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The Problem of Democracy in Contexts of Polarization*

Imer B. Flores**

Abstract

In this paper I argue that contemporary democracies all over the world are more polarized than ever and intend to analyze not only the conditions of possibility of a democracy, in general, and in contexts of polarization, in particular, but also the relationship between democracy and polarization. My claim is that polarization, if certain conditions are met, more than a problem it is a great opportunity to democracy and a greater democratization. Hence, I bring to mind that it was Ronald Dworkin, who recently asked about the

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conditions of possibility of a democracy and its relationship with polarization by developing a partnership conception of democracy in contraposition to the majoritarian conception. Besides, I call into attention the classics that have emphasized the relationship between democracy and polarization, since Robert A. Dahl coined the term ‘polyarchy’, such as Samuel P Huntington and Norberto Bobbio. Finally, I conclude that against all odds polarization is a great opportunity for democracy and a greater democratization.

Keywords: Democracy, Majority, Minority, Polarization.

1. Introduction

Revising the conditions of possibility in a democracy is a problem which demands a great deal of attention on its own (*per se*), but which in contexts characterized by increasing polarization deserves a greater awareness simply as a must (*sine qua non*). In fact, at the moment, our contemporary democracies all over the globe seem to be quite polarized or in the process of becoming even more.¹ Let me advance that my aim is to discuss the conditions of possibility of a democracy, in general, and in polarized contexts, in particular. My hunch is that if democracy is possible *here* and *there* --in contexts characterized by their polarization-- it is possible *everywhere* if certain conditions are met

¹ Keep in mind, in addition to the *Québécois* bloc and the separatist movement in Canada, the close presidential elections in the United States of America in 2000, Mexico in 2006, and Germany in 2010; the hung parliamentary elections in both Australia and Belgium in 2010, and the closest ones --since 1992-- in the United Kingdom also in 2010; and the fact that most systems with a ballotage system end up in the second round, for instance, Colombia, France and Peru in 2011. Clearly, polarization is not reduced to election day, but close or hung elections do exemplify it pretty well.

and what's more it is polarization which gives us a hint of the (minimal) conditions of possibility of a democracy.

Hence, I intend to analyze which are the conditions of possibility of a democracy, but I must first in section 2 emphasize which is the relation between democracy and polarization to check whether they are compatible or incompatible. For that purpose, *i.e.* to test their compatibility or incompatibility, we will bring to mind: first, two conceptions of “democracy”; and, second, four characterizations of “polarization”. Then, later on, in section 3 I will return to democracy and its conditions of possibility: if democracy and polarization are compatibles, polarization is a great opportunity for democracy and a greater democratization.

2. Democracy and Polarization

Let me recall that some years ago, in March 2006, a book titled *Is Democracy Possible Here? Principles for a New Political Debate* by Ronald Dworkin (2006) appeared, based in the Scribner Lectures that he delivered at Princeton University the previous year. Dworkin begins by acknowledging an increasing polarization between the two dominant cultures in the United States of America, represented by the ideologies of the two main political parties, who not only disagree about almost everything including the scope of their disagreements, but also --and even worse-- neither have nor show respect the one for the other and vice versa to the extent that he cautions: “We are no longer partners in self-government; our politics are rather a form of war.” (Dworkin 2006: 1) In addition, Dworkin warns that the split between the two poles may become an “unbridgeable gulf” if there is “no common ground to be found and no genuine argument to be had” in order to seek and eventually reach a broad consensus. On this regards, he adds:

Democracy can be healthy with no serious political argument if there is nevertheless a broad consensus about what is to be done. It can be healthy even if there is no consensus if it does have a culture of argument. But it cannot remain healthy with deep and bitter divisions and no real argument, because it then becomes only a tyranny of numbers. (Dworkin 2006: 6)

Notwithstanding, he advances that it is still possible to find some shared principles to make a national political debate possible and profitable (Dworkin 2006: 6-7). To the extent that in his opinion it is necessary to reinvigorate the argumentative dimension of politics and as a consequence it is useful to deliberate and discuss (Dworkin 2006: 8). As mentioned above, before proceeding to analyze which are the conditions of possibility of a democracy, we must emphasize which is the relation between democracy and polarization to check their (in)compatibility, by bringing to mind: first, two conceptions of “democracy”; and, second, four characterizations of “polarization”.

A. *Democracy*

According to its etymology --*demos* (people) and *kratos* (government, power or rule)-- “democracy” means “government, power or rule of the people”. It is *prima facie* a form of government in contraposition to other forms of government. The classical typology includes not only three “pure” forms: 1) “autocracy” (better known as “monarchy”) as the government of *one* --i.e. the monarch; 2) “aristocracy” as the government of *few* --i.e. the better ones; and 3) “democracy” as the government of *all* --i.e. the people. But also three “impure” forms: 1) “tyranny” as the government of *one* --i.e. the tyrant; 2) “oligarchy” as the government of *few* --i.e. the rich; and 3) “demagogy” as the government of *many* (on behalf of all) --i.e. the poor (or the mob).

It is worth to mention that Aristotle considered “democracy” pejoratively, an equivalent to the term “demagogy”, as one vicious extreme in contraposition to “oligarchy” as the other vicious extreme, whereas his *politeia* was the virtuous middle term by comprising the government of both the poor and the rich (Aristotle 1988: 97-8). Let me explain that, different to him, I will reserve “demagogy” for the “impure” form and “democracy” for the “pure” one. But similar to him, I will assume that the latter is the government of *all* the people: not only of both the poor and the rich but also of both the many and the few (or alternatively of both the majority and the minority).

The problem is that for some authors “democracy” seems to be reduced to the government of the *many* or of the *majority* in detriment of the *few* or of the *minority*, a so-called majoritarian or populist democracy. On the contrary, a true “democracy” and democratic government must be neither of poor or rich, nor of many or few (nor of majority or minority), but of all: both of poor and rich, both of many and few (both of majority and minority).

So far the notion of “democracy” as a form of government and the typology has served to emphasize the ownership (or partnership) “of” the political or sovereign power, depending on whether it corresponds to one, few, many, or all. Nevertheless, the exercise of this political or sovereign power not only must be done directly and indirectly “by” its owners (or partners) and their --legitimate-- representatives, but also must be done “for” them and their benefit, not in their detriment. The three ideas already sketched can be put together into an integral definition, such as the one embodied in Abraham Lincoln’s maxim and in the “Preamble” of the Fifth French Republic’s motto: “government *of* the people, *by* the people, *for* the people” (Lincoln 1863/1990: 308; the emphasis is mine).

In that sense, a true “democracy” must be the government of, by and for all the people: poor and rich, many and few... men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, believers and non-believers... and so on. Hence, I will consider “democracy” as the “government *of* all the people, *by* all the people --directly on their own (“direct democracy”) or indirectly through their representatives (“representative democracy”) -- and *for* all the people” (Flores 2005a: 154-7; and 2008a: 314-9).

However, as stated a couple of paragraphs above, the problem is that there are two competing and conflicting conceptions of democracy. As far as I know the distinction can be traced all the way back to John Stuart Mill, who, in his *Considerations on Representative Government*, under the epigraph “Of True and False Democracy: Representation of All, and Representation of the Majority Only”, indicated:

Two very different ideas are usually confounded under the name democracy. The pure idea of democracy, according to its definition, is the government of the whole people by the whole people, equally represented. Democracy as commonly conceived and hitherto practiced is the government of the whole people by a mere majority of the people, exclusively represented. The former is synonymous with the equality of all citizens; the latter, strangely confounded with it, is a government of privilege, in favor of the numerical majority, who alone possess practically any voice in the State. This is the inevitable consequence of the manner in which the votes are now taken, to the complete disfranchisement of minorities (Mill 1861/1958: 102).

In Dworkin’s perspective, at the present time, the two competing conceptions of democracy not only coexist but also are still in conflict:

The two views of democracy that are in contest are these. According to the *majoritarian* view, democracy is government by majority will, that is, in accordance with the will of the greatest number of people, expressed in elections with universal or near universal suffrage. There is no guarantee that a majority will decide fairly; its decisions may be

unfair to minorities whose interests the majority systematically ignores. If so, then the democracy is unjust but no less democratic for that reason. According to the rival *partnership* view of democracy, however, democracy means that the people govern themselves each as a full partner in a collective political enterprise so that a majority's decisions are democratic only when certain further conditions are met that protect the status and interests of each citizen as a full partner in that enterprise. On the partnership view, a community that steadily ignores the interests of some minority or other group is just for that reason not democratic even though it elects officials impeccably majoritarian means. This is only a very sketchy account of the partnership conception, however. If we find the more familiar majoritarian conception unsatisfactory, we shall have to develop the partnership view in more detail (Dworkin 2006: 131).

Actually, as he acknowledges, the United States of America is neither a pure example of the majoritarian conception of democracy nor of the non-majoritarian (or partnership) one. Although the bipartisan system and the majority rule reinforced the former, since the founding fathers limited the power of the majorities in various forms, by including anti-majoritarian devices, which were latter reinforced by other institutions, such as the filibuster and the judicial review (of the constitutionality) of the acts of the other (elected) branches of government, it can be said that they also supported the latter (Dworkin 2006: 137 and 135).² On one side, a minority of either thirty-four or forty-one (out of the one-hundred senators) can block the majority of bringing a decision to a final vote, depending on whether it is a substantive or procedural issue. And, on the other, the

² In fact, the existence of the Senate was designed to divide the most dangerous branch of government and to give stability to the government by protecting the minorities against a speedy and unreflected legislative majority in the House of Representatives. For an illustration of the filibuster, *vid.* Frank Capra's film "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" (1939).

power of the political majorities is limited by the recognition of individual constitutional rights that legislative majorities cannot infringe and much less step over.

Aside, Dworkin alerts that the degraded state of the public debate endangers the partnership conception of democracy and strengthens the majoritarian one, including viewing the other as an enemy and politics as a war:

If we aim to be a partnership democracy... the degraded state of our political argument does count as a serious defect in our democracy because mutual attention and respect are the essence of partnership. We do not treat someone with whom we disagree as a partner --we treat him as an enemy or at best as an obstacle-- when we make no effort either to understand the force of his contrary views or to develop our own opinions in a way that makes them responsive to his. The partnership model so described seems unattainable now because it is difficult to see how Americans on rival sides of the supposed culture wars could come to treat each other with that mutual respect and attention (Dworkin 2006: 132-3).

B. Polarization

Since the term “polarization” is ambiguous and as such considered either as an activity-process or product-result (of such activity-process) we must stipulate our use of them. Accordingly we are going to reserve the verb “polarize” to the activity-process and “polarization” for the product-result. On one side, “polarize” means to “cause division of opinion: to make the differences between groups or ideas ever more clear-cut and extreme, hardening the opposition between them, or become ever more clear-cut and extreme in this way.” On the other, “polarization” means “concentration, as of groups, forces, or interests, about two conflicting or contrasting positions” and of which a rational conciliation seems highly or near to impossible (for example, between those for and against: abortion, death penalty, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and so on). By the same

token, the polarization describes the formation of antagonistic (social) classes or groups and its confrontation (*verbi gratia*: bourgeois-proletariat, capitalist-socialists, conservative-liberal, democratic-republican, left-right, moderate-radical, poor-rich, rural-urban, and so on).

Anyway, we can distinguish between two great options regarding polarization: (1) *exclusion* of one group by the other or (2) *inclusion* of one group by the other. Similarly, each option can be further divided into two theses: one strong and the other weak. On one side, in case of exclusion: (A) the *strong* version is characterized by the annihilation, elimination, execution, extinction, or suppression of the “different”, especially if “dissident”, which is considered as an “enemy”, *i.e. ethnic cleansing* or *mass deportation*, and may lead to an “authoritarian or totalitarian imposition-restoration”; and (B) the *weak* version is depicted by the division, excision, fragmentation, secession, or separation into two or more parts, which are not willing to cooperate, *i.e. balkanization* for short, and may lead to a “libertarian emancipation”. On the other, in case of inclusion: (C) the *strong* version is illustrated by the agitation, confrontation, convulsion, or tension between majorities-minorities and may lead to a “majoritarian or minoritarian tyrannization”;³ and (D) the *weak* version is portrayed by the deliberation, discussion, participation or representation of all partners and may lead to a (pure or true) “democratic association”.

³ Elsewhere I have characterized these different situations as “majoritycracy”, *i.e.* “government of the majority”; and, as “minoritycracy” (*i.e.* “government of the minority”); and even as “partycracy”, *i.e.* “government of political parties”) (Flores 2005a: 159; and 2008a: 338-9).

From the preceding lines, it is possible to derive four different characterizations of “polarization”: two of which are openly incompatible with any conception of democracy --(A) and (B); and, two of which are presumably compatible with democracy: one with the *majoritarian conception* --(C); and, other with the *partnership conception* --(D). Since there is not much of democratic in (A) and (B), we will analyze only the two versions presumably compatible with democracy in the search for the one that is purely or truly so. In (C) polarization is recognized either as the oppression of minorities by majorities or the opposition of minorities against majorities to the extent that it is coherent with the *majoritarian conception*, and as historical example we can mention the case of Venice. On the contrary, in (D) polarization is renowned as the association between both majorities and minorities to the extent that it is consistent with the *partnership conception*, and as historical example we can mention the case of Florence.⁴

Nowadays, we tend to attribute to “polarization” a negative connotation, but “democracy” has not necessarily a positive one, keep in mind Winston Churchill’s speech where he characterized democracy as a “lesser evil” in the continuum: “Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” (Churchill 1947/1979: 150). Let me elucidate, I am trying to suggest that it may be the case that at least one form of “polarization” is a “lesser evil” for democracy than other tendencies, including those of “non-polarization”. Therefore, I not only conceive

⁴ I am grateful to Mario Conetti for pointing me to the historical cases of Venice and Florence as representative of the majoritarian and the partnership conceptions, respectively.

“polarization” as an opportunity for “democracy” and not necessarily as the problem in itself but also perceive that the partnership conception of democracy is better suited than the majoritarian to deal with polarization. Let me suggest that the latter by either trying to avoid or confront polarization might end up increasing it or even multiplying it, whereas the former by trying to engage or face polarization through a serious public debate might wind up decreasing it or reducing it.

3. Conditions of Possibility of Democracy

Let me advance that as a working hypothesis, we are going to criticize and reject any answer to the question on whether democracy is possible that runs from an absolute pessimism or even skepticism in one extreme (“*not here, nor there, nor anywhere*”) to an unlimited optimism in the other extreme (“*here, there and everywhere*”). On the contrary, we pretend that it is possible here, there and everywhere, if and only if certain conditions are met, despite of being a polarized society. Instead of being before a fatality proper of *Cassandra*, who foresees the future but can not do anything to change it; we are before a great opportunity proper of *Pollyanna*, who sees in every situation despite its bad or negative side the possibility of finding a good or positive point (Crozier *et al.* 1975: 3).

In this part, we are going to revise the conditions of possibility of a democracy by recalling: firstly, the Report of the Trilateral Commission of mid-1970s, in general, and the part on the United States of America prepared by Samuel P. Huntington, in particular; and, secondly, the so-called “false promises of democracy”, following Norberto Bobbio’s characterization, which will lead us into considering some substantive ideals for democracy.

1. *The Crisis of Democracy (and the Third Wave of Democratization)*

In the “Introductory Note” to the book published in 1975 as *The Crisis of Democracy*, but well known simply as *Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, Zbigniew Brzezinski (1975) clarifies that despite the frequency and insistence with which it is asked: Is democracy in crisis? The authors of the book consider that “democratic systems are viable”. But, deemed that it is necessary that the “people truly understands the nature of the democratic system” and for that purpose “reexamine its basic premises and functioning”.

On this regard, the authors of the *Report* identify three different challenges for the democratic government: 1) *Contextual (and External)*, such as a world economic crisis which can lead to serious problems for the functioning of democracy; 2) *(Contextual and Internal)*, such as the social structure and social tendencies within the country; and 3) *Intrinsic*, which are proper to the functioning of a democracy, to the extent that: “The more democratic a system is, indeed, the more likely it is to be endangered by intrinsic threats.” In a few words: “The demands on democratic government grow, while the capacity of democratic government stagnates.” (Crozier *et al.*, 1975: 8-9) As Huntington observed, in the part devoted to the United States of America:

The vitality of democracy in the United States in the 1960s produced a substantial increase in governmental activity and a substantial decrease in governmental authority. By the early 1970s Americans were progressively demanding and receiving more benefits from their government and yet having less confidence in their government than they had a decade earlier... The vitality of democracy in the 1960s raised questions about the economic solvency of government; the decrease in governmental authority produced doubts about the political solvency of government. The impulse of democracy is to make government less powerful and more active, to increase its functions, and to decrease its authority (Huntington 1975: 64; emphasis is original).

Albeit, he questioned, among other things: “Does an increase in the vitality of democracy *necessarily* have to mean a decrease in the governability of democracy?” (Huntington 1975: 64; emphasis is original) Besides, he accepts that the diminution of the governmental authority can be explained by the increase in political participation and the decrease in the levels of trust of the people toward the government. Similarly, he remembers: “During the 1960s public opinion on major issues of public policy tended to become more polarized and ideologically structured, that is, people tended to hold more consistent liberal or conservative attitudes on public policy issues.” (Huntington 1975: 76). And insinuated that there were two reasons of why: 1) the nature of the themes themselves, which included social, racial and military matters; and 2) the features of those who participate actively in politics tended to have consistent and systematic perspectives on matters of public policy; and hence: “The increase in political participation in the early 1960s was thus followed by heightened polarization of political opinion in the mid-1960s” (Huntington 1975: 77).

In this way, Huntington explains not only the appearance of polarization in a democracy but also its causes and consequences or effects:

The polarization over issues in the mid-1960s in part, at least, explains the major decline in trust and confidence in government of the latter 1960s. Increasingly, substantial portions of the American public took more extreme positions on policy issues; those who took more extreme positions on policy issues, in turn, tended to become more distrustful of government. Polarization over issues generated distrust about government, as those who had strong positions on issues became dissatisfied with the ambivalent, compromising policies of government. Political leaders, in effect, alienated more and more people by attempting to please them through the time-honored traditional politics of compromise (Huntington 1975: 78).

In addition, he explains that there is a cyclical process of interaction between political participation-polarization-distrust-political efficaciousness, in which (Huntington 1975: 84):

- (1) An increase in the political participation leads to an increase in the polarization of the public policies;
- (2) An increase in the polarization of public policies leads to an increase in the distrust of the people and a decrease in the political efficaciousness of the government; and
- (3) An increase in the distrust and a decrease in the political efficaciousness of the government lead to a decrease in the political participation.

The result of this cyclical process is a paradox: an increase in political participation will at the end lead to a decrease in political participation: “an upsurge of political participation produces conditions which favor a downswing in political participation.” (Huntington 1975: 85) Similarly, he points out that the decrease in political participation produces conditions that favor the decadence of the party system, including party-identification, party-votation and party-cohesion.

Although, Huntington advises “The single most important status variable affecting political participation and attitudes is education”, (Huntington 1975: 110) he still admits:

The governability of a democracy depends upon the relation between the authority of its governing institutions and the power of its opposition institutions. In a parliamentary system, the authority of the cabinet depends upon the balance of power between the governing parties and the opposition parties in the legislature. In the United States, the authority of government depends upon the balance of power between a broad coalition of governing institutions and groups, which includes but transcends the legislature and other formal institutions of government, and the power of those institutions and groups which are committed to opposition (Huntington 1975: 91-2).

It seems that the way out from the tension between democracy and polarization, besides requiring greater levels of education of the citizenry, depends in the relation between the government or ruling party and its opposition; or, alternately, in the relationship between the ruling majority and the opposing minority. What's more, in the conclusion of the *Report*, the authors emphasize the necessity of searching and even reaching a common agreement or shared purpose.⁵ They illuminate, on one side: "In a democracy... purpose cannot be imposed from on high by fiat." (Crozier *et al.*, 1975: 160) And, on the other:

Without common purpose, there is no basis for common priorities, and without priorities, there are no grounds for distinguishing among competing private interests and claims. Conflicting goals and specialized interests crowd in one upon another, with executives, cabinets, parliaments, and bureaucrats lacking the criteria to discriminate among them. The system becomes one of anomic democracy, in which democratic politics becomes more an arena for the assertion of conflicting interests than a process for the building of common purposes (Crozier *et al.*, 1975: 161).

Analogously, as we have already seen, Dworkin had appreciated that, on one side, a democracy can be and remain healthy in no-polarization situations despite lacking a serious *public debate* as long as there is a broad *consensus* about what must be done. And, on the other, a democracy can be and remain healthy even in polarization situations in spite of missing a shared *consensus* about what must be done as long as there is a culture of *public debate*.

⁵ Even the most polarized society can reach a common agreement or shared purpose: sometimes in the form of a common cause or enemy.

It seems that democracy is identified with a widespread *consensus* among all the participants or partners and when it is not possible to reach one with a serious *public debate*. It is the *public debate* which facilitates reaching a *consensus* by finding *ex post* a common agreement or purpose (as a starting point): first, having a public debate; and, later, if necessary, voting; and not the other way around. By the by, this view reinforces the “partnership conception” and makes democracy possible regardless of polarization.

On the contrary, if polarization is said to be so deep as to cancel the possibility of finding a momentous *consensus* via a common agreement or purpose and of having a serious *public debate*, it seems that the only thing left is to vote to see who has *ex ante* the bigger number: lacking a public debate and going directly into voting, as the slogan “Let’s vote” puts forward.⁶ But as Edmund Burke criticized: “It is said, that twenty-four millions ought to prevail over two hundred thousand. True; if the constitution of a kingdom be a problem of arithmetic.” (Burke, 1790/1937: 190) By the way, this view reinforces the “majoritarian conception” and leads towards not only the majoritarian or minoritarian tyrannization but also to oppression-opposition and even more polarization.

B. *The false promises of democracy (and the future of democracy)*

When Bobbio published, in 1984, the book titled *Il futuro della democrazia* (i.e. *The Future of Democracy*), he warned --in the first chapter, which gives the name to the collection of essays-- about the existence of six false promises of democracy (Bobbio, 1986: 23-42):

1. The birth of the pluralist society;

⁶ Elsewhere I claim that there are limits to majority decision making and voting (Flores 2006; 2008b; and 2010a), such as issuing an amnesty with absolute pardons and without truth commissions. I am grateful to Mariela Morales Antoniazzi for pointing out this case to me.

2. The renewed vigor of particular interests;
3. The survival of oligarchies;
4. The limited space to participate;
5. The subsistence of the invisible power; and
6. The uneducated citizen.

Apparently, the Italian jurist and political scientist was charging democracy of having promised:

First, to give birth to a uniformed and united society, but instead it has delivered not only a diversified and divided society but also a pluralized and even a polarized or radicalized one, characterized as “poliarchy” or “poliarchical” society by Robert A. Dahl (1956; 1967; 1972; and 1981; Dahl and Lindblom, 1953). However, as we have already proposed, it is not necessary to achieve an ample *consensus* between all the “poles”, but at least possible to initiate a serious *public debate* between all of them: parties, partners or poles.

Second, to vindicate the interests of the people, but since it is impossible to have all the people permanently gathered or constantly called upon to make or take directly by them all the decisions (“*direct democracy*”), the option was to elect their representatives, who will make or take indirectly all the decisions for them and supposedly on their behalf (“*representative democracy*”). It is worth to mention that the (political) representation has relied on the principles that the representatives must resemble the constituencies and look after the general or public interests, but is not necessarily considered as an agent or delegate acting “for them” and dependent of their lead, but mainly as a trustee acting “on

their behalf’ and somehow independent of them, and to some had reinforced on the contrary of the particular or private interests (Pitkin 1967; Flores 2005b: 30-1).⁷

Third, to unify the economic conditions by controlling the oligarchy and restricting the appearance of ruling elites or groups linked directly to them and their interests. But the presence not only of oligarchies but also of economic differences between rich and poor, and even worse between prosperity and poverty, as well as the subsistence of elites, reinforces the picture portrayed by Joseph A. Schumpeter (1947) who pointed out that those ruling elites and groups organized through political parties compete against each other in the hunt for votes. As you can imagine, I am neither against the existence of such elites or groups as such, nor the fact of the competition against each other, as long as they are willing to enter into a serious public debate, not a mere *façade* and even worse a battling ground or war.

Fourth, to open and even multiply spaces for the participation (and representation) of all, but they remain closed and once they are opened remain limited or restricted to a very few. The representation, as we have seen, becomes a mere delegation, whereas the participation is reduced to its minimal expression with periodic elections, (near to) universal suffrage, and a more or less direct, free, secret and popular vote. Likewise, the very few open spaces are limited or restricted to political parties and, as a consequence, the participation --and representation-- of all is reduced only to a few and mainly

⁷ Elsewhere I have criticized the tendency that Guillermo O’Donnell labeled as “delegative democracy” as the “government of the people by their delegates” (O’Donnell 1993a; and 1993b; and Flores, 2008a: 338).

mediated by them. What's more, there are still vast groups of society marginalized of the political process (Flores, 1998; 1999; and 2002).

Fifth, to make the exercise of power much more transparent and visible to the citizen, who will not only can participate of it, but also should know the actions of the government and check them, to the extent that democracy also means government *before* the people or accountable to them. Moreover, as we have already seen, the demands on the government have increased, while its capacity of response decreased, leading towards an exercise of power through bureaucratic and technical apparatus, such as bureaucracy, *i.e.* the government of the bureaucrat, and technocracy, *i.e.* the government of the technician, which are neither transparent nor visible to the citizen, who remains left out of the loop and the invisible power is still there (Weber 1922/1968: 956-1012; Flores 1998: 96-7; and 1999: 202-3).

Sixth, to educate all the citizens and to guarantee equality of opportunities, but instead of having active and (well-)informed citizens, the ruling class(es) and elite(s) seem to prefer passive and non-informed ones, who remained subjects and not (truly) citizens and less partners in self-government. The lack of education is, as we have already pointed out following Huntington, one of the obstacles for democracy and a pending matter if we are truly committed towards democracy, specially, in the substantive partnership conception.

Let me recall that Bobbio --and a vast majority of his disciples and followers-- has emphasized the procedural conception over the substantial one and has insisted in a minimal definition of democracy “characterized by a set of rules (primary or basic) which establish *who* is authorized to take collective decisions and which *procedures* are to be

applied.” (Bobbio 1984/1987: 24) Actually, the subtitle of his book, in the English translation, is precisely “A Defense of the Rules of the Game” and as such an apology of the procedural conception of democracy. Notwithstanding, he enunciates that in spite of everything:

[M]y conclusion is that the broken promises and the unforeseen obstacles which I have surveyed here are not sufficient to ‘transform’ a democratic regime into an autocratic one. The essential difference between the first and the second has been preserved. The minimal content of the democratic state has not been impaired: guarantees of the basic liberties, the existence of competing parties, periodic elections with universal suffrage, decisions which are collective or the result of compromise... or made on the basis of the majority principle, or in any event as the outcome of open debate between the different factions or allies of a government coalition (Bobbio 1984/1987: 40).

Anyway, before ending, he adds surprisingly to his notion of democracy, as the (procedural) rules of the game, a (substantive) appeal to values, by accepting that “ideals are necessary” (Bobbio 1984/1987: 41) and among them he enumerates (Bobbio 1984/1987: 41-2):

1. The ideal of toleration;
2. The ideal of non-violence;
3. The ideal of the gradual renewal of society via the free debate of ideas and the modification of attitudes and ways of life; and
4. The ideal of brotherhood.

As you can see the ideals of toleration (without fanatisms) and of free debate of ideas (without preconceived or predetermined truths) coincide with the serious public debate, on one hand, and the ideals of non-violence (in peaceful contexts) and brotherhood --or fraternity-- (with common agreements and shared purposes) correspond to the mutual or reciprocal attention and respect that is due, on the other hand. Although,

Bobbio insists openly on a procedural --and as such majoritarian-- conception, he admits covertly on the substantial --and as such a partnership--conception by adding the necessity of ideals and by appealing to values, as well as by requiring decisions -- regardless of the collective process, compromise between parties or the fact of being made according to the majority rule-- to be the “outcome of open debate” between the different parts of the whole.

Finally, as Dworkin has emphasized:

The majoritarian conception purports to be purely procedural and therefore independent of other dimensions of political morality; it allows us to say, as I indicated, that a decision is democratic even if it is very unjust. But the partnership conception does not make democracy independent of the rest of political morality; on that conception we need a theory of equal partnership to decide what is or is not a democratic decision, and we need to consult ideas about justice, equality, and liberty in order to construct such a theory. So on the partnership conception, democracy is a substantive, not a merely procedural, ideal (Dworkin 2006, 134).

IV. Conclusion

As we have seen a pure or true democracy implies not the necessity of a momentous *consensus* but the possibility of a serious *public debate*, which facilitates the quest for common agreement and shared purpose, starting with mutual and reciprocal attention and respect. Therefore, it is necessary the participation and representation of all the citizens, including a better and greater education of all the people, men and women, poor and rich, religious and secular, old and young; a political system opened, not closed, characterized by the existence of political parties, but neither limited to them nor reduced to election day or voting; and a closer relationship between government or ruling party and opposition, majority and minority... characterized by the collaboration of all, through

deliberation and discussion of the different themes, in the name not only of general interest and not in the particular, partial or party interest, but also of what unites all and not what divides them from us.

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