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DEMOCRACY AND LIBERALISM: CRISIS, PATHOLOGIES AND RESISTANCE

Let me have men about me that are fat;
Sleek-headed men and such as sleep o' nights;
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look;
He thinks too much: such men are dangerous.

William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

There is a cult of ignorance in the United States, and there has always been. The strain of anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.

Isaac Asimov, *A Cult of Ignorance*

ABSTRACT

Liberal capitalist democracy is a universal socio-political project of our age. But this project is in crisis and in decline. The current crisis of democracy caused by the Darwinist spirit of the late capitalist order only proves that democracy is an instrument for strengthening the dominant positions of the ruling liberal elites. In other words, democracy, in particular liberal democracy as a hegemonic form of the contemporary global democratic project, functions as a formal ideological-instrumental framework for the reproduction of the dominant

position of a ruling class serving the interests of the few, not the many. In this way, anti-democratic sentiments among the masses are fuelled almost everywhere in both Western and non-Western cultures where political elites have assumed a formal democratic mask. Furthermore, the existing crisis of the Western liberal democratic project has given crucial benefits for the revival of anti-elitist populism in the contemporary world. The goal of this paper is to critically examine the fate of democracy in modern times as well as to shed light once again on the crisis of the liberal conception of democracy, including its concomitant pathologies, resistances, and political and social consequences.

Key words

liberal democracy, democracy, liberalism, neoliberalism, capitalism, elites, populism, West, post-communist, crisis, ideology

Introduction: Tangled Strings of Democracy

Even though democracy is a universal and imitative political project in the contemporary world, certainly the objective of the ancient Greeks was not its universalization. As is widely known, democracy was one type of political order among other existing types and ancient political thinkers never considered democracy to be the best form of governance. Socrates, for instance, never perceived democracy as an ideal political regime. In reference to Socrates' attitude towards democracy, Leo Strauss said:

In a democracy, he asserts, no one is compelled to rule or to be ruled, if he does not like it; he can live at peace while his city is at war; sentence to capital punishment does not have the slightest consequence for the condemned man: he is not even jailed; the order of rulers and ruled is completely reversed: the father behaves as if he were a boy and the son neither respects nor fears the father, the teacher fears his pupils while the pupils pay no attention to the teacher, and there is complete equality of the sexes; even horses and donkeys no longer step aside when encountering human beings (Strauss, 1964, p. 132).

Both Plato and Socrates believed that the central problem of democracy was that it put a stronger emphasis on freedom than on virtue, while the latter was perceived by both to be fundamental for an ideal society. In Plato's political theory, democracy is precisely described as a political regime which arises from oligarchy, whose ultimate objective is to achieve not virtue but freedom (Strauss, 1987).

But let us discuss the state of democracy in the contemporary era. Ironically, today the word “democracy” is still associated with “rule by the people”, as was suggested in ancient Greek political theory. But the conventional wisdom of the modern Western democratic project aims to internalize the powerful dictum of the supremacy of representative democracy. In his influential work *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Joseph Schumpeter famously argued that “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.” (Schumpeter, 2003, p. 269). Thus in this context, in the age of representative democracy where parliamentary politics is in the centre of state power, Schumpeterian understanding of minimalist democracy is probably the most popular among today’s political elites across the globe. Other important liberal authors, for example Almond and Verba, argue that the core idea of the democratic system in Western societies is about providing opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate in political decisions, meaning that a high quality of political culture determines a high quality of democracy (Almond & Verba, 1963). But is it really so? Does modern representative democracy embrace the power of the people?

Ideally, it is believed today that electoral participation is one of the central indicators of active citizenship in modern liberal democracies, but the question is whether elections are enough for citizens to exert control over the political agenda, or perhaps they serve only as a trick to manipulate society. Already in Enlightenment times, it was the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau who viewed parliamentary politics as a trap for citizens when he revealingly stated that “[t]he people of England believes itself to be free; it is quite wrong; it is free only during the elections of Members of Parliament. Once they are elected, the people is enslaved, it is nothing” (Rousseau, 1999, p. 127). Was Rousseau too radical and sceptical in his evaluation of the nature of elections in England? Should his words be interpreted only in the context of the political system in the 18th century? This is rather doubtful. Even in the age of the contemporary hegemony of representative democracy, citizens still remain powerless to control the political agenda, and thus elections are probably the only means of realizing or demonstrating the power of people. However, even in this case it can be only a particular type of hobby and not a deeper sense of commitment. Robert Dahl, one of the most eminent Western liberal theoreticians of democracy, believes that citizens in liberal democracy have certain resources to influence political life. For instance, voting and contributing to political campaigns are among those. However, he also argues that the “chances are very great that political

activity will always seem rather remote from the main focus of his life” (Dahl, 1961, p. 224).

Dahl also proposed canonical criteria for the democratic process. They include effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, agenda control and the inclusion of all adults (Dahl, 2000). Ironically, all these criteria are celebrated by many political and academic elites as central for establishing the ideal political system and social order even though, very frequently, those criteria are not implemented or are subject to manipulation in today’s democracies. The criteria are also used by global political elites as a principal “methodological” tool to describe the quality of democracy in states that are in transition. In practice, nowadays when we speak about democracy and about the spreading of democratic values and standards worldwide, on the whole we think and mean the Western liberal concept of democracy. But is liberal democracy the only socio-political concept in political theory?

A renowned Polish sociologist and political scientist Jerzy Wiatr proposed a very strong critique of the hegemony of Western liberal democracy and attacked the intellectual idealization of the liberal democratic project by academic elites in the West. In his intriguing and inspiring article *Civic Culture from a Marxist-Sociological Perspective* which criticizes Almond and Verba’s concept of *Civic Culture*, Wiatr rebels against the domination of Western liberal democracy. Wiatr argues that political theory has more than one model of democracy and that the Anglo-American model must not be perceived as the only one. His critique of Almond and Verba’s work is based on the argument that they use Anglo-American concepts of liberty and democracy as yardsticks to evaluate the quality of democracy and political culture in the world (Wiatr, 1989, pp. 106–118). This Polish scholar points to the difference between Anglo-American and French concepts of democracy, meaning that the French model, different from the Anglo-American one, idealizes the value of equality, while the Anglo-American model puts a very strong emphasis on the value of liberty. Therefore Wiatr’s major critique of Almond and Verba is that “[t]hey overconcentrate on the values of liberty and participation at the expense of the value of equality. It partly reflects the lack of sensitivity to problems of socio-economic justice and the general anti-radical posture adopted in their work” (Wiatr, 1989, p. 118).

Naturally, both Dahl’s and Schumpeterian views on democracy are the most hegemonic interpretations of the concept of democracy today. However, as presented above, Wiatr argues that academic elites in the West are usually methodologically and ideologically restrained in their use of other positions than

the one dominant in Western political and cultural life. Given this, it is possible to claim that along with liberal apologists for democracy, there is a long list of profound thinkers, including Wiatr, who have developed a very strong critique of Western liberal democracy and who make use of very strong intellectual and academic support for such a critique. This paper will discuss in detail who those thinkers are and why their thoughts are relevant in order to understand the contemporary crisis of democracy.

1. Privatizing Democracy

The political objective of modern liberal democracy is quite different from its original meaning. It attempts to ensure more participation in political life by experts (civic elites, professionals) and a technocratic managerial class, and by using this method, it significantly excludes the participation of ordinary citizens who are not members of the ruling class or its allied strata. In this respect, the “expertization” and “technocratization” of politics is the most important task for many liberal democracies today. The idea behind such elitist politics and approaches is to increase the oligarchic tendencies in democratic life and to idealize the professionalization of politics.

It is also very important to reveal and to understand that originally democracy never meant to give power to others, or to put it simply, democracy was never invented in ancient Greece as power for representatives who are (in the liberal democratic order) supposed to serve the nation in the manner of representative democracy. Cornelius Castoriadis, a Greek-French philosopher and an enthusiastic critic of the Western liberal democratic project, strongly argues that:

One should remember that for classical political philosophy, the notion of ‘representation’ is unknown. For Herodotus as well as for Aristotle, democracy is the power of the demos, unmitigated in matters of legislation, and the designation of magistrates (not ‘representatives’!) by sortition [lot] or rotation. Scholars merely repeat today that Aristotle’s preferred constitution, what he calls *politeia*, is a mixture of democracy and aristocracy, and forget to add that for Aristotle the ‘aristocratic’ element in this *politeia* is the *election* of the magistrates – for Aristotle clearly and repeatedly defines election as an aristocratic principle (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 276).

Considering modern tendencies of the “expertization” of politics, it is clear that Castoriadis revolts against the alienation of citizens from politics. In this way, it forms an anti-political practice that provokes the growing tendency to expert

participation in political life and in the decision-making process. He argues that “[t]here are not and cannot be “experts” on political affairs. Political expertise – or political ‘wisdom’ – belongs to the political community for expertise, “*techne*”, in the strict sense is always related to a specific, ‘technical’ occupation and is, of course, recognized in its proper field” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 277).

Obviously, such a critique of the “management” of political life is also a critique of the spirit of the modern democratic project today which definitely aims to depoliticize citizens and to empower the greater participation of expert, civil, cultural and professional elites in the process of democratic politics. In this respect, all these tendencies make the modern project of democracy an elitist project and one morally alienated politically from the vast majority of citizens. Furthermore, citizens are trained and influenced to be politically apathetic by the ideological mechanisms of a modern state. Theoretically, the principle of liberal democracy does not perceive democratic politics as a game of elites and professionals. But on a very practical level, considering the capitalistic-individualistic spirit of today’s liberal democracy, it is mostly presented as a political project of dominant elites which embraces the neoliberal theory of state and society as well as the doctrine of cultural liberalism. In this way, the contemporary liberal democratic order is intolerant to alternative systems, meaning that any other forms of democracy which are oriented to “non-elitist” practices and attitudes are declared to be obscurantist and degrading for the overall quality of political life.

Castoriadis’s critique of Western capitalist democracies was presented throughout 1970-80s, but it is an argument still valid today. Both practically and theoretically, the sole interest and purpose of the postmodern political condition is to advance the spirit of an atomized and individualized society. Postmodern politics suppresses the ideals of collective action and solidarity, and in this way it also encourages nihilism and scepticism. Therefore, in such conditions, democracy indeed has become for the citizens a useless political instrument. Today, democracy has become a useful practical and ideological tool for political and economic elites to legitimize their power and discourses. Of course, in order to formalize the legitimization of power and discourses, elections are used as an instrument of legitimization and recognition of elitist politics by “empowering” citizens to decide who must rule the state. Sadly, in a contemporary liberal democratic state, elections only indicate the formal rituals in political life – a theatrical performance, a pause taken by elites to give an ephemeral power to people to decide who is competent to be in power. But in reality, feelings, emotions and sentiments are manipulated during elections by political actors, meaning that

the winner is the one who has more resources (financial, cultural, political, etc.) for organizing this powerful manipulative ritual. However, considering the current deep crisis of liberalism, the neoliberal political class has become increasingly powerless to manipulate people and to avoid the anger caused by neoliberal democracy. This paper will present how citizens can avenge themselves against this class.

2. Moral Problems of Liberalism

For the sake of clarification, it is necessary to discuss firstly the concept of liberalism, and then to define and discuss what a liberal democratic state means and how it functions.

It is generally agreed that the classical model of liberalism is an ideological product of the British Enlightenment which aims to restrict the power of state and to idealize the value of individual liberty. In this context, classical liberalism emerged as a reaction against the absolute monarchy and unlimited power of dynastic states in Europe. However, liberalism never emerged as an ideological instrument in favour of everyone's right to pursue their happiness and freedom, but it rather concentrated on a vulgar defence of the political and economic interests of the wealthier class. Robert Michels, a German sociologist, argues that neither conservatism

[n]or does the theory of liberalism primarily base its aspirations upon the masses. It appeals for support to certain definite classes, which in other fields of activity have already ripened for mastery, but which do not yet possess political privileges — appeals, that is to say, to the cultured and possessing classes (Michels, 2001, p. 11).

Unsurprisingly, the political and economic endeavours of classical liberalism evoke the spirit of a Darwinist social order. Moreover, it is argued that it is hostile to a welfare state, which – according to the liberal theory of society – violates the principle that “each individual ought to look to their own welfare” (Ryan, 2007, p. 363). Therefore, evidently, classical liberalism experiences ethical and moral problems due to its individualistic aspirations and attitudes.

Although the authors of classical liberalism glorified the idea of liberty, it does not necessarily mean that they spoke about freedom for everyone or, to put it precisely, classical liberalism never defended the doctrine of universal emancipation. Ironically, for instance, John Locke, the champion of liberty and one of the brightest representatives of classical liberal traditions was also

the greatest oppressor, he was a shareholder in the Royal African Company and a secretary to the Council of Trade and Plantations – very powerful structures of oppressive and imperialistic English politics at that time. The political theory of John Locke is precisely based on the idea of a man's economic liberation from the restrictions established by the government, which means that "Locke's theory of property explains the necessity for a transition from the state of nature to civil society" (Goldwin, 1987, p. 495). This claim that Locke's political theory aims to abolish the absolutist nature of political power and to transform it into a political institution which is assigned with the sole task of preserving liberty and property. According to Goldwin, Locke uses the word "property" in a comprehensive sense, which means "life, liberty and estate" and thus for Locke in a "state of nature" property is unsafe, while political society as an alternative to the "state of nature" is a guarantor of property, and thus its defender of life, liberty and estate (Goldwin, 1987, p. 496). Indeed, the concept of political society is a very important and intriguing element of Locke's political theory, its instrument for putting an end to the tyranny of absolute power so that power belongs to the community, but also it was a mechanism for England's wealthy class to institutionalize and legitimize their economic interests and property.

Although in classical liberal theory political power belongs to all men who are born as equal, in fact such power only belongs to those members of the community who are more powerful than others, who have resources to mobilize and to consolidate that power. Both practically and theoretically, the British Enlightenment and British classical liberal narratives became major sources and an inspiration for modern parliamentary politics or representative democracy. This is a very speculative form of democracy, meaning that on a conceptual level representatives are expected to represent the interests of the entire nation, but on a practical political level they only represent the interest of the wealthy class and of oligarchic groups inside the dominant political elites.

In his brilliant book *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, an Italian Marxist philosopher Domenico Losurdo interestingly and very comprehensively argues that liberalism as an ideological category and system of political beliefs largely contributed to the development and advancement of various forms of oppression, and it made powerful efforts to strengthen violent political and social processes, including colonialism, slavery, genocide, snobbery, racism, etc. Losurdo's principal argument alongside others is that the pioneer states of classical liberalism, particularly the Netherlands, Great Britain and the United States of America, were major investors in the slave trade. Liberal intellectual thinkers in those colonial empires simultaneously were slave owners and enemies of true liberty

with racist and obscurantist stances, and what is more dramatic and interesting is that those so-called liberal nations were treating their slaves more terribly than even despotic states (Losurdo, 2011). This means that the objective of classical liberalism and of its founding fathers was not to engage in proselytising for human emancipation, but on the contrary, to legitimize, intellectualize and standardize slavery and the freedom of slave owners. In other words, it can be said that classical liberalism aimed to empower the freedom of those who own wealth and property. Losurdo broadly criticizes John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*; he attacks the ideas of Locke and claims that

[t]he *Two Treatises of Government* may be regarded as key moments in the ideological preparation and consecration of the event that marks the birth of liberal England. We are dealing with texts deeply impregnated with the pathos of liberty, the condemnation of absolute power, the appeal to rise up against the wicked ones who seek to deprive man of his liberty and reduce him to slavery. But every now and then frightening passages open up in this ode to liberty, where slavery in the colonies is legitimized (Losurdo, 2011, p. 23).

Considering this, it is possible to argue that the political writings of Locke are reflections of the class interests of an English liberal philosopher who was also involved in slave trade. Indeed, Losurdo's contribution to the critique of liberalism is a deeply valuable academic and intellectual narrative that helps us to understand the moral crisis of modern liberal democracy as well. Moreover, Losurdo's attempt to shed light on an alternative history of liberalism as an oppressive ideological category originating from the imperialist spirit of the Atlantic states, also illustrates the immorality of liberal order as irrelevant to the principal pathos of democratic order.

But is classical liberalism the same as the contemporary version? Although it is generally agreed that contemporary liberalism is different from the classical one, it is quite difficult to argue that there is a fundamental difference between them. Naturally, John Rawls, for instance, famously insisted on proposing a new agenda for liberalism embracing the ideals of liberty and equality as foundations for a "great society", but in fact, it failed due to the impossibility of escaping the spirit of capitalist aspirations. In Samir Amin's words:

John Rawls' egalitarian liberalism, made fashionable by an insistent media popularization, provides nothing new because it remains prisoner of the liberty, equality, and property triplet. Challenged by the conflict between liberty and equality, which the unequal division of property necessarily implies, so-called egalitarian liberalism is only very moderately egalitarian. Inequality is accepted

and legitimized by a feat of acrobatics, which borrows its pseudo concept of “endowments” from popular economics. Egalitarian liberalism offers a highly platitudinous observation: individuals (society being the sum of individuals) are endowed with diverse standings in life (some are powerful heads of enterprise, others have nothing). These unequal endowments, nevertheless, remain legitimate as long as they are the product, inherited obviously, of the work and the savings of ancestors (Amin, 2009, p. 16).

Samir Amin is very much correct here when he points to the role of media in the popularization of Rawl’s theory of liberalism. Today, this tendency to present a new liberal theory as more *social* and *progressive* is so much emphasized in mainstream media that it strives to delegitimize and deconstruct all social, cultural, economic and political ideas that are in conflict with this new theory. Of course, the principal aim of this propaganda hysteria is to find a survival strategy for liberal capitalism by making general reference to it as an ultimate cultural and political order.

3. Forced Marriage of Liberalism and Democracy

As liberalism is an ideological platform for capitalism, the crisis of liberalism today means also the crisis of liberal capitalistic democracy.

Carl Schmitt, one of the most provocative anti-liberal political thinkers in contemporary political thought, was probably one of the most outstanding critics of liberalism and modern project of democracy. Schmitt argued that there is an inevitable conflict between the nature of liberalism and democracy. According to him, the crisis of modern mass democracy is a quite complex process; he writes that

[e]ven if Bolshevism is suppressed and Fascism held at bay, the crisis of contemporary parliamentarism would not be overcome in the least. For it has not appeared as a result of the appearance of those two opponents; it was there before them and will persist after them. Rather, the crisis springs from the consequences of modern mass democracy and in the final analysis from the contradiction of a liberal individualism burdened by moral pathos and a democratic sentiment governed essentially by political ideals. A century of historical alliance and common struggle against royal absolutism has obscured the awareness of this contradiction. But the crisis unfolds today ever more strikingly, and no cosmopolitan rhetoric can prevent or eliminate it. It is, in its depths, the inescapable contradiction of liberal individualism and democratic homogeneity (Schmitt, 1988, p. 17).

This means that the moral and ethical disharmony between the pathos of liberalism and the task of democracy in practice creates disorder. In particular, under such a system, the concept of individualistic liberties is advocated while other problems (social justice, solidarity, equality etc) are in a chaotic state. For Schmitt, the practice of parliamentary politics and the entire spirit of the representative system cannot be considered as a part of democracy since such a practice and system is embodied in the doctrine of liberalism, not in democracy. Another interpreter of the irreconcilable clash between liberalism and democracy in Western societies was Cornelius Castoriadis. He strongly believed that the real form of government in Western liberal countries is not of a democratic but oligarchic nature. More precisely, what he underlined is that Western capitalistic democracies are strictly dominated by the spirit of individualism, consumerism and liberal liberties, where power belongs to small oligarchic groups and not to the people, so that original meaning of democracy is completely deconstructed (Castoriadis, 1997, pp. 18–35).

Of course, one may also argue that Castoriadis's critique of liberal democracy in Western societies is precisely based on his emotions, assumptions or even on the ideological argumentation of a Marxist intellectual who has a grudge against liberal democracy. However, there is no doubt that the social and political reality existing in Western democracies is also the subject of harsh criticism from various ideological or even ideologically free perspectives. Empirically, democratic politics in the West has assumed the nature of powerful oligarchic tendencies, and even a crisis in the fundamental elements of political culture (for example, decreasing citizens' electoral participation) is a strong indicator of low trust and nihilism towards political institutions, political elites and political leadership in Western cultures. In the age of later capitalism, we witness a dramatic restoration of the ideals of classical liberalism which provokes the emergence and strengthening of a Darwinist social order. Do such tendencies in Western political life affect the idea of democracy? I think, yes, they do indeed. The domination of oligarchic tendencies in Western societies has increased not only scepticism towards the idea of a democratic system but it has even provoked aggression towards democracy. Dramatically, such nihilistic, sceptical or aggressive attitudes towards the idea of democracy are also found in transitional democracies, particularly in the post-communist realm, where similar to the West, elites have assumed the role of democrats while the vast majority remain nihilistic to democrats and democracy.

Definitely, unlike the philosophy of classical liberalism, modern liberal democratic states do not postulate or directly legitimize and institutionalize

slavery, but this has happened thanks to the changing dynamics of the social order in the world. This means that undoubtedly, under later capitalist order, one cannot establish and demand the classic structure of slavery. However, fetishism of the market and free trade on the one hand, and the rejection of the ideals of social justice and equality on the other are aggravated by a new type of slavery which means that the citizens of liberal democratic countries are manipulated and ruled by dominant financial stakeholders (banks, corporations, industrialists) who have merged their interests with those of the liberal elites.

To put it more precisely, the current hegemony of powerful economic elites and their influence on political life is precisely the expression of the oligarchic form of Western democracies. And dramatically, what is more important is that growing oligarchic tendencies in contemporary Western democracies jeopardize the perspectives of a stable social development which is crucial to saving democracy. Therefore, the current crisis of liberal democracy in the West and also the current democratic backlashes in the so-called new European democracies can also be perceived as a crisis of the good life, of well-being. Historically and empirically, it is observed that any violent, obscurantist and anti-human social and political processes are mostly rooted in deep socio-economic stagnation and the failure of the state. In other words, structural violence emerges simultaneously with the collapse of democracy and of economic well-being¹. Also, strengthening the authoritarian-minded spirit of many societies today in both Western and non-Western cultures is a reaction against the tyranny of capital and money both in developed and transitional democracies. Given this, antagonism and aggressive attitudes towards liberal democratic regimes in the contemporary world are based on growing trends of inequality and poverty which not only damage the overall quality of life but discredit the entire idea of democracy.

Certainly, it is true that inequality provokes all kinds of degeneration in politics and society, and this also means that it determines the nature of the political regime. And of course, inequality is the principal foe of democracy. But there is still one question which must be answered clearly: do we see growing inequality today in the Western hemisphere and in the rest of the world? My argument is that the world is becoming more unequal simultaneously with the growing hegemony of capitalist elites and corporations, and trends in inequalities may

¹ For instance, the dramatic failure of the Weimar Republic in Germany and the deep economic crisis that inspired and empowered Nazi ideology. One of the most important instruments for Nazi politicians to mobilize supporters was their rhetoric based on conspiracies regarding why Germans had become poor in their own homeland

be observed and identified everywhere in the West as well as in other parts of the world. In 2013 a French economist Thomas Piketty published his monumental *Capital in the 21st Century*, one of the most significant studies describing the state of inequality in the contemporary world. Piketty wrote:

Modern economic growth and the diffusion of knowledge have made it possible to avoid the Marxist apocalypse but have not modified the deep structures of capital and inequality—or in any case not as much as one might have imagined in the optimistic decades following World War II. When the rate of return on capital exceeds the rate of growth of output and income, as it did in the nineteenth century and seems quite likely to do again in the twenty-first, capitalism automatically generates arbitrary and unsustainable inequalities that radically undermine the meritocratic values on which democratic societies are based. There are nevertheless ways democracy can regain control over capitalism and ensure that the general interest takes precedence over private interests, while preserving economic openness and avoiding protectionist and nationalist reactions (Piketty, 2014, p. 1).

Consequently, considering the academic and intellectual findings of Piketty, it is possible to conclude that the existing drama of global inequality brings democracy into a deeper crisis and makes it a nihilistic political project. Again this, of course, is not something strange in the history of humanity, as history teaches us that democracy has no chance of survival without securing the ideals of social justice and equality.

4. Rise and Fall of the Post-War “Great Compromise”

In his *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, Nicos Poulantzas wrote:

Today, as always, the state plays the role of political unifier of the power bloc and political organizer of the hegemony of monopoly capital within the power bloc, which is made up of several fractions of the bourgeois class and is divided by internal contradictions. The relation between the state and the monopolies today is no more one of identification and fusion than was the case in the past with other capitalist fractions. The state rather takes special responsibility for the interests of the hegemonic fraction, monopoly capital, in so far as this fraction holds a leading position in the power bloc, and as its interests are erected into the political interest of capital as a whole vis-a-vis the dominated classes (Poulantzas, 1975, p. 157).

Although Poulantzas wrote this text in the 1970s, his perceptions may very well suit the objectives and mission of a contemporary capitalist state in the age

of neoliberal globalization. Let me explain what I mean here. It is my belief that the current crisis of modern democracy, and the huge wave of criticism concentrated on it, is caused not only by the greed of liberal elites but also by the function of a state under liberal rulers. But in order to understand clearly what I mean, let us look more closely at recent historical events.

We know that the rise of fascism in Europe and the disaster of World War II resulted from the dramatic failure of the Weimar Republic in Germany and were rooted in the deepening economic crisis and class conflicts in Europe during the interwar period. The Great Depression affected Europe too, which deepened the gap between the rich and the poor. European capitalist states, including the Weimar Republic, were completely unable to react adequately to the challenges of the economic crisis and what is more, inequalities and aggression towards the political and economic elites in Europe increased tremendously. This is how the Nazis and Fascists in Europe were given “unique” opportunities to use this drama in European life and thus to offer a terrible alternative politics to the people. Therefore, in this respect, even though it may sound quite radical, we may say that the capitalist social order in Europe, which generated inequalities and social injustice for many decades in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th, hold responsibility for the emergence of the great disasters in the history of humanity, including fascism and wars.

That is why after World War II, the vast majority of Western European states opted for the model of a welfare state. The idea of such model was to find class harmony in post-war Europe in order to avoid the dramatic growth of socio-economic inequalities and to put a strong emphasis on the idea of social solidarity as a guarantor of domestic peace and harmony. However, for Western Europe, it was not easy to achieve such a consensus and to form a welfare democracy. Moreover, it was not conditioned by the achievements of capitalism. Domenico Losurdo argues that the advent of the welfare state was not a result of reformed capitalism in post-war Europe, but rather it was a result of the political and social mobilization of subaltern classes; he concludes:

In the West, the welfare state emerged not in the USA but Europe, where the trade union and labour movement is traditionally more deep-rooted; and it emerged when that movement was at its strongest, because of the discredit which two world wars, the Great Depression, and fascism had brought upon capitalism (Losurdo, 2016, p. 3).

The lessons of the political and socio-economic tragedy of the first half of the 20th century taught the new European political elites that the old bourgeois

order had to be changed not only to save Europe from another social, economic, cultural and political catastrophe, but also to save capitalism from total collapse. Therefore, the welfare state appeared *mutatis mutandis* in the political life of post-war Europe. However, as Losurdo underlines, the formation of a welfare state was also greatly conditioned by the mobilization of the oppressed classes. Considering this, some Western European societies embraced democratic socialism and suppressed the capitalist class².

But the period of expanding the welfare system and the promotion of class harmony in Europe lasted only until the mid-1970s and it started to weaken particularly in the 1980s when the neoliberal doctrine became active in Western political life. Since then, the language of the welfare state and the moral pathos of solidarity have been announced as anachronistic as they get in the way of the ideas of private property, individual rights and economic liberty. This means that in the 1980s classical liberalism attempted to rise in the form of free market fundamentalism, known as the neoliberal order. Sadly for the future of democracy in the West, this attempt was powerful and energetic and again created prospects for class disharmony in Western societies.

Although there are various academic debates on the standard definition and meaning of neoliberalism, many scholars agree that neoliberalism is a political project focused on re-engineering the idea of the state (Bockman, 2012). In addition, there is a consensus among scholars that a neoliberal state is something which favours the interests of the capitalist class by setting up certain rules, practices and institutions, which then guarantee the rights and freedoms of a wealthy class (Bockman, 2007; Bourdieu, 1999; Chomsky, 1999; Harvey, 2005; Wacquant, 2009). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, neoliberalism became a kind of fashionable doctrine both in Western and Eastern Europe. In conversation with Gunter Grass, Pierre Bourdieu claimed that he understood neoliberalism as a conservative revolution that “restores the past but presents itself as progressive, transforming regression itself into a form of progress. It does this so well that those who oppose it are made to appear regressive themselves” (Grass & Bourdieu, 2002, p. 65). Moreover, the neoliberal condition is something that suspends and degenerates the political mind from thinking wisely and

² For example, the so-called “Nordic social democracy” was more devoted to the supremacy of equality and solidarity rather than other so-called “continental European welfare states”. In Sweden, the politics of *Folkhemmet* and the rise of the social ideas of Gunnar Myrdal in the post-war period symbolized the radical nature of a Swedish deconstruction of the old capitalist order.

accurately. The great Polish social thinker, Zygmunt Bauman, rightly observed that “[t]he difference between neoliberal discourse and the classic ideologies of modernity is, one might say, the difference between the mentality of plankton and that of swimmers or sailors” (Bauman, 1999, p. 127). Indeed, it is so clear that neoliberal elites today have the mentality of plankton, unable (and unwilling) to move towards alternative changes and practices.

Consequently, considering the anti-political aspects of neoliberalism, the objective of neoliberal democracy is to plot against the idea of a state. It portrays a state as an ontologically evil phenomenon, which must be restricted and demonized. In this way, the democratic elites in Europe have gradually internalized the neoliberal ethics of depoliticizing politics and hence suppressed the idea of a state as a political association of citizens, the idea emphasized by Aristotle. A state in the age of neoliberal capitalism has become an instrument for liberal elites to advocate the interest of hegemonic groups and thus to put down the interests of the masses. In general, according to critical social and political theory, the function of a state historically was never to follow the interests of ordinary people but to serve the interests of ruling elites. Even though it sounds as though it is an historical truth, as mentioned above, the idea of a state has changed significantly over a certain period in post-war Europe, but truly this “golden age of the state” had only a short life in Western Europe. Therefore, even though the welfare model is perceived by many scholars as a manipulative mask of a capitalist state, this particular project became a target of deconstruction by liberal elites in the post cold-war era.

The state in contemporary Western culture has been hijacked by small hegemonic groups who are so powerful that they play a crucial role in creating the principal agendas of political, socio-economic and even cultural life. Let me explain what I mean here. The dominant financial and economic elites together with cultural and civic elites, are controlling the functioning of the state. For them (I mean for liberal elites) there is no better state than a liberal democratic one (which is transformed into a neoliberal one) and thus there is no alternative to the liberal democratic order, both locally and globally. For this purpose, liberal hegemonic groups (political, economic and cultural elites) in the West apply certain techniques of social control in order to strengthen the domination of liberal discourses on the one hand, and to avoid the emergence of alternative public discourses that are in conflict with liberal doctrine, on the other. The global campaign for the demonization of all other political ideologies than liberalism or neoliberalism symbolizes such techniques of social control. Citizens are limited in the expression of their critical views on Western democracy

and on the ineffectiveness of liberalism by the fear that they will be perceived as marginal and obscurantist. The contemporary Western capitalist state has embodied monolithic political narratives, meaning that everybody who critically questions the moral and ethical culture of a capitalist society is perceived as a social parasite of humanity. This totalitarian language of contemporary Western democracy has become another factor leading the idea of democracy into deeper crisis. What is more, the contemporary capitalist state and the ruling class have developed an agenda inconsistent with the demands and interests of the masses.

5. Populist revenge against the *hostis publicus*

Now we must address the painful question of populism, it can be said that it is the sword of Damocles for democracy today. Although populism has become a negative term in contemporary politics, it was never meant to have such a connotation in the past. For instance, in ancient democratic Athens it was Pericles who had the pleasure and privilege to be called a populist. For Athenians, Pericles was a populist because he was a great citizen, innovator and celebrated orator who brought about the golden age for Athens. Also, one may argue that Julius Caesar in Rome was another great orator and populist, the loved ruler of all the Romans who dedicated his life to the glory of the people and engaged in a ruthless struggle against the republicans who did not favour the interests of ordinary Romans but those of the privileged aristocratic class: the patricians. In general, in a historical dimension, populism was always an indicator of the powerful passion to serve and sacrifice for a nation. Consequently, it can be said that populists were the heroic rebels who brought historic changes to their societies; such a list might include William Wallace, Joan of Arc, Maximilien Robespierre, Emiliano Zapata, Ernesto “Che” Guevara and many others.

Today, in the age of crisis, the discourse and original meaning of populism has been transformed into relatively negative use and contextualization. Though populism is mostly perceived as the language of undemocratic politics, some influential authors argue that all democratic societies are a compromise between democratic and non-democratic logic, and it is a check and balance system functioning in modern democracies in order to both guarantee and limit popular will (Panizza, 2005, p. 30). However, our objective here is not to discuss correlations between populism and anti-democratic thinking, but to understand what provoked the emergence of current populism and who are the populists of today.

Although political parties in contemporary democracies and in transitional societies never formally rejected the role of the masses in legitimizing their power and ambitions, oligarchic tendencies are so comprehensively internalized in their activities and in the political life they rule that it would be quite infantile to believe in a “popular” base for modern political parties. Obviously, the logic of the current capitalist system and the dominant positions of large corporations and financial stakeholders in political and socio-cultural life has contributed to a greater dependence of political parties and political leaders upon the agenda and rules of the game created by hegemonic financial elites. Of course, in such a painful process of discrediting the entire project of democracy and party politics, the majority both in democratic and moreover in emerging democratic societies are in search of those political parties which may express their interests and who will revenge themselves on the behalf of people. Here populism assumes its important role and political parties, sceptical towards and harshly critical of liberal democratic order, have adopted populist language and strategy.

The role of the media in representing both populist and liberal-democratic discourses is relatively high which makes the crisis of democracy even greater. Of course, since all mainstream media (it may also be called “corporate” media) are owned by large financial capitalists who try to demonize populist discourse and by this method give favour to liberal democratic discourse. They do so as such discourses are more compatible with the interests and agenda of the dominant financial elites who own the major media outlets almost everywhere in the world. But, ironically and controversially, every attempt by corporate media to demonize anti-system populism ends up with the triumph of the populists. The reason for such tendencies is that the political language and style of representation in the media (by liberal democratic elites) are both alien and unacceptable for the ruled class. The majority of people, who are victims of today’s antisocial neoliberal order, are more delighted to follow angry rhetoric of populist leaders than the elitist rhetoric of the leaders of traditional democratic parties.

The political language chosen by populists is illiberal and based on a lust for revenge against the liberal political class. Obviously, populist narratives and anti-elitist language are welcomed by the ruled class as oppressed by the ruling class. In general, we see quite aggressive mental and rhetorical battlefields between liberals and populists. In this context, let us discuss the role of language in this process and how its discourses are represented by discourse makers as well as the social acceptance of these discourses. But before doing this, first of all, let me underline the language game that is generally popular in the contemporary political life of Europe and not only. According to Bourdieu, language games

in democratic culture play a crucial role, and television serves as a platform for such games:

The model of what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls the language game is also useful here. The game about to be played has tacit rules, since television shows, like every social milieu in which discourse circulates, allow certain things to be said and proscribe others. The first, implicit assumption of this language game is rooted in the conception of democratic debates modeled on wrestling. There must be conflicts, with good guys and bad guys... Yet, at the same time, not all holds are allowed: the blows have to be clothed by the model of formal, intellectual language. Another feature of this space is the complicity between professionals that I mentioned earlier. The people I call “fast-thinkers,” specialists in throw-away thinking—are known in the industry as “good guests” They’re the people whom you can always invite because you know they’ll be good company and won’t create problems. They won’t be difficult and they’re smooth talkers. There is a whole world of “good guests” who take to the television format like fish to water and then there are others who are like fish on dry land (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 35).

In this way, populists in the corporate media are represented as bad guys, while the liberal democratic elites are represented as good guys, but of course, this does not mean that they have the same image in the perception of ordinary people not for those who own the media, but for those who watch television. We can also use Bourdieu’s conclusion on “good guests” for understanding formal debates among various liberal democratic groups whose language, different from the language of “bad guys”, is disharmonious with the interests of ordinary people. In this way, populist discourse makers are those illiberal political forces who attempt to present their discourses as pro-popular and anti-elitist, while liberal discourse makers are those who present populist narratives as evil and immoral. However, of course, unsurprisingly, the recent tendencies in political life of many European nations indicate that populist discourses have relatively greater social acceptance than the liberal ones.

But who are the populists and the populist discourse makers today? To illustrate the tremendous rise of illiberal populist elites, we can look at the politics of Western, Central and Eastern Europe. Poland and Hungary perfectly exemplify the rise and fall of liberal elites. In particular, the parliamentary elections in Poland in 2015 displayed the crisis of democracy and liberalism. The victory of the conservative *PiS* with 37.6% of votes and the good result of the right-wing populist group *Kukiz’15* (8.8%) (established just several months prior to the elections) illustrate the reaction of average Poles against the elitist language of cultural liberalism and neoliberal policies imposed by *Civic Platform*. The failure of

social democratic forces in Polish elections also exemplifies the low level of trust in the society of the social democratic elites as they usually replicate the narratives of the liberal elites.

A similar political drama for liberal elites developed in Hungary in the parliamentary elections both in 2014 and 2018. In 2014, the victory of *FIDESZ* (44.9%) and the success story of the relatively new right-wing movement *Jobbik* (20.2%), and at the same time the failure of the liberal political class, created a stronger crisis of liberal democracy in Hungary and helped the illiberal Prime Minister and the leader of *FIDESZ*, Viktor Orban, to expand his power. Moreover, in 2018 Orban and his party again celebrated victory by receiving 49.27% of votes, while *Jobbik* achieved a good result by getting 19.06%. It must be underlined, that one of the most important success formulae for Victor Orban in both elections was to organize a moral attack on the doctrine of cultural liberalism, while the critique of international neoliberal financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, also got (and generally gets) an important place in his rhetorical-ideological agenda.

The crisis of liberal elites and liberal democracy is also quite clear in Western European democracies. Let us concentrate on France and Italy. In France, the elitist liberal policies of the Socialist Party, under the leadership of French president Francois Hollande (2012–2017) fuelled nationalism and the new revival of *Rassemblement national* (formerly *Front national*), led by the charismatic nationalist – Marine Le Pen. It is worth noting that the contemporary French Socialist Party perfectly illustrates the crisis of traditional socialist groups in Europe who have embraced liberal democratic policies and language and thus distanced themselves from the people. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that *RN* won the 2014 European Parliament Election in France with 24.86% of votes and thus defeated both *UMP* and *PS*.

Even though the victory of Emmanuel Macron in the French presidential elections of 2017 saved the French liberal class from total destruction, it was a successful moment for French populists and illiberal forces, articular, in the first round, the two candidates harshly criticised liberal and neoliberal thinking (however from different ideological perspectives), Marine Le Pen (a right-wing conservative) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon (left-wing), received 21.30% and 19.58% of votes, while neoliberal Macron got 24.01% of votes. In the second round, conditioned by a strong mobilization of the all-powerful liberal and anti-nationalist forces, Macron received 66.10% of votes, while Le Pen got 33.90%. Despite Le Pen's loss, the elections were quite successful for her, and illustrated her growing popularity among the masses. Furthermore, it is clear is that the anti-elitist

populist discourse in French political life seems to occupy a powerful position as long as liberal parties and the political leadership do not reject their neoliberal nature. This seems to be quite difficult for the French liberal class. In Italy, the general election in 2018 also proved the deep crisis of liberal democracy and the revival of illiberal populism. Although no party or coalition received enough votes to form a government independently, the elections were definitely successful for nationalist and populist political groups, who after three months of consultation and negotiation formed a new populist government. In particular, the success of the right-wing populist party *Lega* (17.69%), led by a hardliner anti-liberal populist Matteo Salvini, and the even greater success of the anti-establishment and anti-elitist party *Five Star Movement* (32.22%), led by a young populist Luigi Di Maio, resulted in another revival in Italian nationalism. The crisis of both cultural liberalism and neoliberal democracy resulted in a victory for illiberal populists in Italy. Moreover, Italy's new ruling political class is even proud to be called populists who serve the interests of people, as underlined by the Italian populist Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte. The success of populists in Italy once again proves that certain aspects of neoliberal doctrines (individualism, identity politics, anti-welfarism, restriction of economic and political sovereignty, globalism and so forth) provokes widespread social and political resistance against contemporary democracy, a system hijacked by ultraliberal (or we may say neoliberal) classes and discourses. Obviously, there are other essential processes and tendencies in the contemporary Atlantic world which show the crisis of liberal democracy and which also need further observance and investigation, for instance, Brexit in the UK and Trumpism in the USA, as well as the recent rise of illiberal forces in Austria, Sweden, Germany and the Czech Republic. Considering all these, we may say that the crisis of liberal democracy, and the political degeneration of liberal elites in contemporary European societies, have created a new political tradition in Europe with a significant rise of illiberal populist groups who generally have similar ideas, strategies, discourses and narratives.

6. Post-Communist Pathology

The fanatical doctrine of free market democracy was also painful for the so-called "emerging democracies" or, let us say, in those non-Western societies where political elites usually imitate the mental and ideological behaviour of Western liberal elites. In this context, post-communist societies are indeed

worth observing. To tell the truth, the dissolution of the Soviet Union aggravated and strengthened political and socio-economic catastrophes which made the vast majority of citizens of post-Soviet states disillusioned about the dreams they had following its collapse. In this way, the troubles of post-communist capitalism even provoked nostalgia for the communist past (Todorova, 2010). In particular, the transition to capitalist order was an extremely painful process which generated enormous inequalities, mass impoverishment, unemployment, collapsing health systems, a rising death rate, etc. (Therborn, 2013). In other words, the major feature of capitalist reconstruction in the former communist bloc was to establish and to deepen the gap between the rich and the poor and thus to create a new type of class society where two different realities co-exist: the “marvellous” reality of the rich and the “dramatic” reality of the poor.

In the time of the transition, the new elites of the post-communist realm invoked a number of “canons” of Western liberal social and political thought which were perceived by them as the principal intellectual and ideological instruments for the effective liberal democratic transformation of post-communist societies. Among these “canons”, individual liberty and the idea of a liberal state played an important role. Unsurprisingly, Atlantic scholars warmly welcomed the wind of change in the ex-communist bloc and appreciated this change as a liberal revolution (Ackerman, 1992; Holmes, 1992). Increasingly, the idealization of Anglo-American traditions of liberal freedoms and the free world invoked and provoked the neoliberalization of socio-political thought in the post-communist realm. An Austrian historian, Philip Ther, argues that “[b]y the early nineties, a political and economic movement toward neoliberal economic policy had emerged in almost all post-communist countries” (Ther, 2016, p. 7). The radical liberal political and economic stance taken by the new post-communist elites was seen as a kind of cultural and political strategy to fight against the communist past and its practices. Critical scholars also argue that the new power elite (alliance of dissident intellectuals and technocrats) in Central and Eastern Europe emerged as a post-communist *Bildungsbürgertum* with an ethical mission to establish capitalist institutions and lifestyles. They also claim that the post-communist *Bildungsbürgertum* took the principal roles of lawgivers and civilizers who developed the “rituals which serve as tools to manage the social and cultural matters of a society during the process of transition” (Eyal, Szeleniy & Townsley, 2000, p. 12). Specifically, the authors identify three rituals of post-communism: *purification*, *sacrifice* and *confession*. In this regard, the rituals of purification and sacrifice played a crucial role in the formation of neoliberal elites in the post-communist realm. In particular, the ideological task

of ritual sacrifices was to deconstruct socialist welfare system in order to “purify the population of welfare dependency” (Eyal et al., 2000, p. 105), while the ideological interest in purification was to create a capitalist man and society, where even unemployment would be morally and ethically accepted as unemployment “breaks the relationship of dependence between the individual and the state, and teaches individuals that they have to be responsible for themselves” (Eyal et al., 2000, p. 106).

Moreover, a market-oriented vision and monetarism were perceived by the post-communist elites as essential ingredients for the Westernization of post-communist space. In particular, it is argued that the market was perceived by many dissidents in Eastern Europe as a “European” invention and “having a market was thus a precondition for belonging to Europe” (Falk, 2003, p. 330). In this way, one may claim that liberalism, and more precisely its radical form – neoliberalism – arrived in post-communist political life as an ideological simulation of the West.

Generally, imitating the ideological, political and institutional practices of the Western world became a task for the rest of the globe in the age of late capitalism. For example, Samir Amin critically observes that US institutions and practices are perceived as something that “should be imitated by all those who hope to be contemporary with the world scene” (Amin, 2004, pp. 9–10). In this way, not only political elites but also the cultural elites of the post-communist world were attached to a discourse of liberal hegemony. Given this, the institutionalization of liberal and neoliberal ideas in political and cultural life has emerged as a major agenda of post-communist transformation. In particular, neoliberal language and liberal terminological signifiers such as “good governance” and “good institutions” have become the principal ideological-linguistic determinants of the democratization process in ex-communist states. In this way, the post-communist elites were influenced by global institutions to adopt a politico-ideological orientation that would fit neoliberal ideas and practices. In other words, good governance is an Anglo-American neoliberal technocratic concept, which is a very important ideological tool for global capitalist institutions to establish a liberal capitalistic state in the process of post-communist state-building. It was Adrian Leftwich who rightly revealed that “good governance means a democratic capitalist regime, presided over by a minimal state which is also part of the wider governance of the New World Order” (Leftwich, 1993, p. 611). In this context, neoliberal ideals and practices are strongly advocated by post-communist party elites to facilitate the “internationalization” of their political *habitués* and, thus, to increase the international sources of their

political legitimacy. This is what happened in the post-Soviet realm where the political elites who passionately accepted a radical liberal ideology labelled themselves as progressive forces, while those who refused to share their liberal stance were demonized and delegitimized. Moreover, the neoliberalization of Eastern European elites and politics was strongly influenced by Atlantic political elites and experts who believed that “development of a market economy and democracy were interconnected and interdependent” (Ther, 2016, p. 10). Given this, managerialism, technocratic rule and monetarism have become dominant in the ideology of post-communist elites (Eyal, et al., 2000). Unsurprisingly, similar to Central and Eastern European states, former Soviet countries have also experienced the drama of the neoliberal economic, cultural and political transition. Of course, in this context, exorcist rituals also emerged.

In Georgia, for example, the post-communist cultural and political elites were deeply interconnected with the organization of such rituals in an even more dramatic way. In other words, the supremacy of the market and emphasis on ultraliberal socioeconomic positions were also used as an ideological tool to purify the society from its communist past. As I have argued elsewhere, neoliberalism in Georgia was particularly celebrated after the Rose Revolution, under the political rule of the eccentric right-wing president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, which placed a stronger emphasis on neoliberal hegemony. Since that revolution, neoliberalism has been presented as the victorious Western ideology that has triumphantly defeated communism. By demonising the communist past on the one hand, and supporting the Westernization of Georgia on the other, the neoliberal elite has consolidated itself. They naturally consider the Baltic states to be ideological partners for their success in implementing the historic mission of decommunization and the neoliberalization of political and cultural life. They perceive a common historical experience and thus the potential to learn from each other on how to find appropriate political and cultural strategies for transforming society. Of course, similar to many post-Soviet states, the drive to establish a right-wing liberal hegemony has institutionalized inequality and strengthened the dominant position of the new ruling class (Berekashvili, 2018, pp. 88–89).

The harmful process of capitalist transformation and free market reformation in the post-Soviet realm was backed mostly by the neoliberal political elites of the West and by international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. Countries such as Georgia, Russia, Bulgaria and Ukraine passionately selected the model of shock therapy as the principal strategy of transition to capitalism, which also meant strengthening oligarchic tendencies

and the hegemony of financial stakeholders who used the post-Soviet crisis for their own benefits³. In this way, the only model of democracy that was externally offered to post-Soviet states was the liberal democratic one. This model, or more precisely, the Anglo-American one, so strongly promoted by domestic elites in the post-Soviet area, was probably one of the most convenient systems for the new economic elites and for the new political class who aimed to restore the hegemony of capital in the period of post-communist transition. Given this, economic liberalism and free market fetishism were equated with the idea of democracy. In other words, the post-communist dictum was as follows: no market capitalism, no democracy. Consequently, many post-Soviet societies were hijacked by the agitation of Westernization in all dimensions of life: political, social and cultural. However, the process of Westernization was certainly an ostentatious project as it aimed to introduce only one segment of Western political and social thought, that is, economic liberalism or the superiority of economic liberty. This means that all other traditions belonging to Western (especially Western European) political life, such as social solidarity and class compromise, were relatively neglected. In addition, all that troubled the capitalistic reformation in the post-communist realm was backed by the Western economic and political elites who also pursued the interests and the possible hegemony of Western capital and politics in the former Soviet Union. Therefore, it is my belief that the process of democratization and political transformation, which only aimed to put a strong emphasis on liberalism, multi-party democracy and civil society, was an instrument for both domestic and international elites to create a political and social atmosphere which could preserve and guarantee powerful domination of the capital.

Some countries like Russia and Belarus managed to escape this particular Western project. Belarus in particular has never experienced an upheaval of a liberal democratic, pro-market fundamentalist elite, while Russia made a very difficult and painful way in the era of Yeltsin, which embraced a comprehensive oligarchic system and democracy; this was a period mostly loved only by wealthy Russian politicians and business elites. This is why the majority of ordinary Russians in practice started to withdraw from the idea of democracy. Therefore, unsurprisingly, later they openly favoured the policies of Vladimir Putin which

³ Here I mean the new economic power class which emerged during the process of massive privatization and who were systematically engaged in the practices of corrupting political elites. This new class also maintained a large influence over the political agenda (e.g. role of Russian oligarchs in defining the Kremlin's policies in 1990s).

rejected the implementation of neoliberal democratic project imposed and backed by Western elites in post-communist Russia. Most importantly, Putin offered to Russians a social and political order which would suit the historical, cultural and anthropological contexts of Russia, which meant introducing a regime led by a powerful semi-autocratic leader. In particular, Putin has concentrated on promoting Eurasionism as an alternative ideological formation resisting Western values and ideals. Unlike Belarus and Russia, Georgia remains loyal to the Western project of democracy. This means that since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the political elites in Georgia have never questioned the conventional wisdom of liberal democracy, meaning that there is no other order than capitalistic democracy. Although the transition to capitalism and market democracy has impoverished Georgian society, the political, economic and cultural elites in Georgia, quite dramatically and cynically, are actively engaged in proselytizing liberal and neoliberal ideas. This means that on the one hand, they obey the agenda of Western capitalist elites and on the other hand, such a social and political order is probably a unique opportunity to cultivate the wealth and dominant position of the ruling class. In other words, in times of post-communist transformation, the Georgian political elites, like many liberal elites in the post-Soviet world, have imitated formal Western liberal language; they have become the main actors of political carnivalization⁴, and this means following the formal ritual of Western capitalistic democracy, for example, to guarantee certain aspects of minimalist democracy, like organizing the spectacle of elections and then to be proud of them. However, considering the current emerging crisis of liberalism and democracy in the USA and Europe, one may also observe that this crisis, including its pathologies, is also gradually expanding in imitative capitalisms and particularly in the post-communist world where ordinary people are disillusioned by the social consequences of post-communist democracy which internalized the politics and practices of a Darwinist order.

⁴ The notion of “carnivalization” I borrow here from the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. As he claims, “[c]arnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people”, see: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Translated by Helene Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 7.

Conclusions

Let us now come back to the considerations with which I started discussing the crisis of democracy in the contemporary (neo)liberal state and make some conclusive remarks for this paper. Ideally, democracy functions perfectly when citizens feel *pleasure* from such a rule. But the Darwinist logic of the later liberal capitalistic discourse of democracy is no way directed to amuse citizens with the fruits of democracy. The current liberal democratic order, already mutated into a neoliberal order (meaning that liberal elites put very powerful emphasis on the tyranny of capital), provides such *pleasure* only for those who own big capital, while the others (the vast majority of citizens) in capitalistic democracies are deprived of this *pleasure*. Thus, the conflict between liberalism and the concept of democracy is so indisputable that when both are merged we see the emergence of oligarchy instead of democracy.

But post-WWII writers and scholars are to blame as well by idealizing the doctrine of liberal democracy and to present both phenomena as harmonious signifiers for the other. Let me explain what I mean here. The majority of apologists for democracy in the second half of the 20th century wrote about its social and cultural determinants only in the context of liberal democracy. For example, let us look at religion as an important socio-cultural determinant. Among the scholars of democracy and democratization, it was a very popular discourse to present such traditional religious beliefs as Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Confucianism as disharmonious concerning democracy, whereas Protestantism was favoured and perceived as something very well suited to its idea. Of course, the main argument of this approach was that Protestantism internalizes the spirit of individualism (Teorell, 2010, pp. 39–52). Therefore, if individualism is an important factor in the democratic system, then one who favours such approach must also clarify that it is about liberal democracy since democracy is a wide concept which means that liberal democracy is not the only form. Apologetics for Western liberal democracy reached their peak after the end of the Cold War, with the famous assumptions of the American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, who wrongly and quite rigidly argued that Western liberal democracy is the triumphal final form of politics (Fukuyama, 1992). But as we see, contemporary liberal democratic systems, hegemonized by the political and cultural advocates of neoliberal doctrines in the West and in the rest of the world, experience profound challenges from the dissatisfaction

of the masses. Given this, we may conclude that current debates on the crisis of democracy are first of all debates on the crisis of Western liberal democracy.

As we have already seen, the critics of liberal democracy argue that the concept of liberalism contradicts the spirit of democracy. There is great intellectual, political and academic speculation about the perfect form of democracy, while in fact the vast majority are diametrically different from each other. While some polemicists argue that socialism is the best ideology (or form) for democracy, others argue that it is direct democracy which can make it functional for the masses. Some scholars focus on the culture of consensus and argue that it is deliberative democracy which can guarantee larger and more effective participation of citizens in political life (Gutmann & Thompson, 1998). Furthermore, there are intellectuals, political and academic critics, who argue that in general democracy is not the best at all.

But today, the power of the discourse claiming that democracy is a regime which has no alternative is so strong that, most importantly, we see a profound critique of democracy only in the texts of classical writers and sometimes only in the texts of Marxist scholars. Contemporary academic and intellectual elites in Western cultures and in those which imitate the West are hijacked by the dogmatism of democracy, meaning that there are formal rights for talking and writing about any political and social processes, including scepticism towards democracy, but in fact, no one actually questions whether democracy is best. This happens because of fear of isolation and marginalization from the elitist cultural space where scholars feel quite comfortable. Of course, there are some who argue that democracy is not working any more, but usually such voices are silenced and detached from academic life. Therefore, considering those limitations, even the emerging critique of liberal democracy among scholars and intellectuals can be understood as a very important step taken in academia towards the development of critical thinking. The critique of contemporary democracy is a necessary moral and ethical task for today's academia in order to unmask neo-liberal democracy, the cultural and political system backed by powerful political, economic and cultural elites who use the hegemonic discourse of democracy for their own benefit.

Consequently, and most importantly, once again, it must be underlined that modern and contemporary conflict as well as intellectual debates between critics and apologists for democracy is rather about a confrontation between the apologists of Western liberal democracy and its critics. Considering the contemporary crisis of liberal elites in both the West and in emerging democracies, intellectual polemics about the future of democracy, and strategies for its survival, have

received an increasingly critical importance in the political and cultural life of the contemporary world. Therefore, who knows, perhaps the crisis of democracy and liberalism will create the chance to replace existing dominant paradigms in politics and society and in this way provide new opportunities for a better future for our world.

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