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Ph.D. Dissertation

Liberal democracy: a globalising hegemonic trajectory

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is inspired by the gradual expansion of democracy after the end of the Cold War, which was however not coupled with a gradual decline in wealth disparities and economic inequality. The dissertation is separated in three chapters. The first chapter attempts a critique on modern representative democracy, with the aim of exposing its fragility to elitism. The second chapter introduces the idea of en masse revocable voting within the context of parliamentary democracy for the first time in academia. The latter constitutes the main contribution of this dissertation. The third chapter is an exploration on the self with regards to death, alienation and political participation. It is further argued that a return of the subject to the public political space and to active political engagement will ease the effects of the existential predicament.

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This dissertation also belongs to all curious minds who dream of more communal societies with solidarity, justice and equality.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated exclusively to my partner Ida Radovanovic, to whom I am grateful for enriching my life with her wisdom, as well as for her remarkable patience and tolerance over the long writing hours.

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Introduction

“The crisis consists precisely of the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born”
Antonio Gramsci

A recent Oxfam study suggested that the richest 1% of the world controlled in 2015 more wealth than the rest of the world put together.¹ This dissertation starts with the a priori assumption that this is a staggering injustice in terms of distributing global resources that needs to be corrected. Marxists would immediately say that such injustices are the result of the unjust control of means of production and therefore the solution lies in reverting capitalism. However, the economic system is simply the outcome of political decisions, unless of course the economic system has been imposed via coercion. That said, capitalism is simply the result of the dominant political system, with democracy (or various form of democracy) currently being the hegemonic political system globally. *If one aims to correct economic injustices, he or she should first target correcting political injustices.*

According to Antonio Gramsci, “The crisis consists of the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born”, what Gramsci called an era of *interregnum*, borrowing the term from Roman history. Zygmunt Bauman has in turn built upon Gramsci to stress that we are currently experiencing an era of *interregnum* in the 21st century because of the separation of power from politics; a crisis of agents. The nation state has currently conceded its power to the global markets, as sovereign states cannot defy the will of the markets in the current globalised environment, in fear of economic

¹ Oxfam, *An Economy For The 1%*, Oxfam Briefing Paper (Oxfam, 2016), <http://www.oxfam.org>, 1.

marginalisation. Bauman believes that the new generations will have to devote their efforts in resolving this interregnum problem and in finding ways to merge again the tasks with the means. Nevertheless, in order to resolve this crisis of agents, we need first to evaluate it thoroughly.

The era of interregnum is characterised by a staggering paradox. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, just 69 electoral democracies existed globally, which jumped to 99 by 1992 and to 125 in 2016²; an evident wave of democratisation. The paradox regards wealth disparities. According to the UN Human Development reports, in 1989 (the year of fall of the Wall), the richest 20% held 83% of global wealth, while in 2015 the richest 20% of the global population held 94% of global wealth.³ *The finding is simple; after the fall of the Berlin Wall democracy expanded throughout the world, but at the same time the rich became richer!* Since democracy is a majoritarian system and the elite constitutes a minority, then why does its power increase with democratization? **Does liberal democracy constitute a globalising hegemony at the expense of the poor? The goal of this dissertation is to answer this question and explore how this modern wave of global democratisation after the end of the Cold War has been linked with a global increase in elite wealth. The goal extends further to proposing ideas for democratic reformation that would disrupt any potential links between democracy and elitism! As part of this effort, I will introduce for the first time in academia the idea of en masse revocable voting within the framework of representative liberal democracy. The latter should constitute the primary contribution of this**

² "Freedom House |", *Freedomhouse.Org*, 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/>.

³ "Human Development Reports | United Nations Development Programme", *Hdr.Undp.Org*, 2016, <http://hdr.undp.org/en>.

dissertation. The dissertation will be separated in three interconnected Chapters, which all contribute as a whole towards achieving the above-mentioned goal.

We have experienced a number of historical social struggles in the 20th and 21st centuries focusing mainly on changing the economic system rather than the political system. However, it will be argued that inequality lies almost predominantly in the political system, while economic systems are a consequent political choice that takes place under certain political structures. The political economy of Acemoglu and Robinson will be merged with the work of Cornelius Castoriadis on autonomy in Chapter 1 to provide a unique academic critique on modern liberal democracy and identify the causality between democratisation and elitism.

Chapter 2 will regard the remedies to the hegemonic trajectory of modern democracy and its fragility to corruption and elitism by considering a pioneering democratic reform idea for academia; the prospect of en masse revocable voting within the framework of representative liberal democracy. The chapter will also include a detailed exposition of Antonio Gramsci and Chantal Mouffe's work on *hegemony*, *war of position* and *radical democracy*. The aggregation of Gramsci and Mouffe's work in one academic Chapter should also be a useful reference for fellow colleagues.

Finally, Chapter 3 will be a support study to Chapter 2 and the primary contribution of this dissertation, i.e. the revocable vote. Chapter 3 will attempt an exploration to the self and of the potential implications that a radical democratic reform (such as the revocable vote) would bear to the human subject. No democratic reform can be considered only at the collective level, without considering the implications on the individual. Existentialism, death and alienation will be discussed in detail providing

a useful academic reference for political theorists, sociologists and fellow philosophers interested in phenomenology and existentialism. The works of Castoriadis and Hannah Arendt is at the forefront of this academic effort. The chapter should also provide a distinctive reference to a merged study of existentialism, death and politics!

Chapter 1: The hegemonic role of liberal democracy

“The philosopher can be objective with regard to nature, but he cannot be neutral with regard to politics”

Hannah Arendt

1.1 Introduction

One of the first theatrical satires of a political system was Aristophanes’ comedy *The Knights*, written in 426BC, raising the issue of politicians who try to deceive the people in order to get elected and achieve personal gain⁴; a message that is diachronic and relevant to modern democracy. Inspired by Aristophanes and the ancient Athenian democracy, this chapter aims criticizing the modern realisation of Western⁵ representative democracy, while considering steps towards the equal distribution not only of de jure but also of de facto political power. In fact, it will be argued that the most popular Western form of representative democracy, i.e. *liberal democracy*, is structured intentionally in a way that behaves as a Trojan Horse of oligarchies across the world, allowing rich elites to influence political decisions via non-voting means, such as lobbying, party-financing, deceiving propaganda or bribing. The latter is not new in academia, but should be revised given the gradual hegemonic expansion of liberal democracy⁶ across the globe. Before continuing further, I should clarify that I do consider liberal democracy to be a dialectical political improvement towards more just societies compared to earlier authoritarian regimes, but that does not relieve it from its current injustices. History has taught us that when people feel mistreated and

⁴ Aristophanes and Alan H. Sommerstein, *Knights* (Warminster, Wilts, England: Aris & Phillips, 1981).

⁵ For reasons of simplification, when utilising the term West in this article, I will be referring predominantly to western Europe, the Americas, South Africa and Oceania.

⁶ In many cases democracies are semi-democratic or even autocratic, despite being modelled after Western liberal democracy.

economically dependent on politicians, in order to satisfy their most basic needs, they tend to resort to the most dangerous ideas and eventually to the most dreadful regimes. The rise of the far right-wing in Europe suggests that the people have become nostalgic of authoritarian and suppressive regimes because the pragmatic democracy they experience is far away from the founding values of democracy.

Democracy, as broadly known, comprises of the Greek words *demos*, which means people and *kratos*, which mean power, i.e. rule of the people.⁷ The term first originated in ancient Greece, where it described the political systems of ancient Greek city-states, the most known of which was the -arguably- direct democracy of the city-state of Athens in the 5th century, instituted predominantly by Cleisthenes⁸. The historical paradigm of ancient Athenian democracy provides adequate ground for comparison with modern democracy and will be discussed in detail in this chapter. The primary goal of this chapter is to criticize the modern realisation of Western democracy, i.e. liberal democracy, while stressing the importance of considering steps towards the equal distribution of de facto political power. In that respect, Athenian democracy can prove to be a useful source of ideas for democratic reform towards more direct forms of democracy. Liberal democracy and parliamentary representation originated from the West⁹ and became increasingly popular in the 20th and 21st century in many countries around the world. According to the Freedom House definition, ‘an electoral democracy which protects civil liberties is considered to be a liberal democracy’, while there were 125 democracies in the world in 2015. Out of those, there were 86 Free countries in

⁷ Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

⁸ John Dunn, *Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁹ For reasons of simplification, when utilising the term West in this dissertation, I will be referring predominantly to western Europe, the Americas, South Africa and Oceania.

which 2.9 billion people live, 59 Partly Free countries in which a total of 1.8 billion people live, while 50 countries are deemed Not Free and 2.6 billion people live in them.¹⁰ What is most notable is that out of 86 liberal democracies in 2015, only ten democracies existed in 1900, while only 24 democracies existed in 1950, which confirms that liberal democracy has followed an evidently expansive trajectory since the early 20th century, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹¹ Let us look at this simply in terms of electoral democracies and not Free countries (i.e. liberal democracies), as not all electoral democracies constitute liberal democracies. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, just 69 electoral democracies existed globally, which jumped to 99 by 1992 and to 125 in 2016, which marks a clear wave of democratisation after the end of the Cold War and the Fall of Communism.¹²

Why is democracy gradually becoming the dominant political system across the globe and why are so many nations willing to move to that direction or propagate themselves as democracies? Even though global democratisation is partially the result of social struggles towards political rights, it will be argued that the introduction and consequent expansion of democracy has not always been the outcome of an honest redistribution of political power within a given society, but rather a strategic concession by elites to the masses to avoid unrest. In fact, I aim to argue that liberal democracy has been structured in such a way that in most cases it allows substantial manipulation by the elites towards achieving economic gains against the rest of the poorer parts of the society. For reasons related to this argument, I will adopt Acemoglu and Robinson's

¹⁰ Freedom House, *Anxious Dictators, Wavering Democracies: Global Freedom Under Pressure*, Freedom In The World (Freedom House, 2016), 9.

¹¹ "Our World In Data", *Ourworldindata.Org*, 2016, <https://ourworldindata.org/democratisation>.

¹² "Freedom House |", *Freedomhouse.Org*, 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/>.

terminology¹³, which separates societies into the elites and the citizens, in which the latter are theoretically more numerous. That said, when referring to *the elites* (or oligarchies), I will be referring to the comparatively rich minorities, while the citizens comprise of the relatively poorer majorities, in short, *the poor*. The *elite-poor distinction* is reminiscent of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic or the consequent Marxist class struggle between capitalists and workers. In my defence, the *elite-poor* distinction is inspired and empirically backed by a recent Oxfam study, which suggests that the richest 1% of the world has accumulated by 2015 more wealth than the rest of the world put together. As a result, *the elites* in this dissertation will regard predominantly the small rich oligarchic minorities, while *the poor* will regard the relatively poorer big majorities. The latter includes the middle class and affluent parts of societies, that Marx would assign to capitalists or the bourgeoisie, hence the distinction differs structurally from the Marxist orthodox terminology. I also acknowledge that modern societies present complicated structures that do not comply adequately with a two-group wealth-oriented distinction. As a result, when necessary I will clearly distinguish the middle class from the rest the poor, while I will address adequately other racial, ethnic or religious distinctions. Before analysing the unequal influence of the elites on political decision-making, it is important to seek the origins of democracy back in ancient Athens and later in Enlightenment, which set the basis for the formation of modern liberal democracy.

¹³ Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson, *Economic Origins Of Dictatorship And Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 15.

1.2 Inequality lies in legislators' permanence, not in representation

The power of elites today is empirically backed by a recent Oxfam study, suggesting that the richest 1% accumulated by 2015 more wealth than the rest of the world put together; a staggering confirmation of global injustices.¹⁴ Marxists would immediately say that such injustices are the result of the unjust control of means of production and therefore the solution lies in reverting capitalism. However, the economic system is simply the outcome of political decisions, unless of course the economic system has been imposed via coercion. That said, capitalism is simply the result of the dominant political system, with democracy (or various form of democracy) currently being the hegemonic political system globally. *If one aims to correct economic injustices, he or she should first target correcting political injustices.*

Even though this would likely be a valid argument, economic disparities and poverty are an everyday reality in almost all liberal democratic countries in the West. In turn, one would also fairly argue that absolute wealth egalitarianism does not need to be a society's exclusive goal. Nevertheless, the profound inequalities and extreme poverty even in democratized societies is a moral decadence in a world of abundant resources that needs to be addressed more radically. In that respect, I adopt Hannah Arendt's view that a philosopher can be objective regarding nature, but should not limit oneself to neutrality, when it comes to politics¹⁵ and such moral decadence necessitates action in order to be reverted.

Looking for a potential remedy to wealth imbalances and poverty at the global scale, one needs to locate precisely the source of *de facto power inequality* within liberal

¹⁴ Oxfam, *An Economy For The 1%*, Oxfam Briefing Paper (Oxfam, 2016), <http://www.oxfam.org>, 1.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Essays In Understanding, 1930-1954* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005).

democracy, which gradually becomes the dominant political system globally. It is evident by now that unlike other theorists, who attack capitalism directly as the primary evil of poverty and wealth imbalances, *I only see such substantial inequality as the result of major injustices in the political sphere.*

I partially derive this approach from Castoriadis, who despite being keen on socialism, he gradually distanced himself from Marxism and focused his critique of modern societies on political institutions. Castoriadis suggests that political power enforcement has always existed and will continue to exist in collective decision-making, unless one believes in the poor anarcho-Marxist utopia that one day humans will take collective decisions spontaneously, without the enforcement of some form of power.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Castoriadis calls for a more autonomous and just distribution of such power. I recall that Castoriadis praises ancient Greece and Western political institutions for organizing the first autonomous political communities, but he remained extremely critical of modern liberal democracy, mainly due to the element of representation. He said in particular that for him there is no other democracy other than direct democracy, which was the main reason of his appreciation to the ancient Athenian regime. Representation appears for the first time in the medieval West in self-governed cities of the 11th-12th centuries and was not known in antiquity. Representation is an insult to the represented and constitutes a modern idea with roots in political heteronomy and alienation, Castoriadis says¹⁷ and further recalls Rousseau's "The British are free once in five years" (i.e. on the election day).¹⁸ The moment voters grant political power

¹⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, *Democracy And Relativity - Δημοκρατία Και Σχετικισμός* (Athens: Στάσει Εκπίπτοντες, 2015), 41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Baltimore, MD.: Penguin Books, 1968).

permanently and irreversibly to a representative, they immediately alienate themselves politically, Castoriadis added.¹⁹ Even though, I share Castoriadis's view that modern liberal democracy is far from an authentic democracy, I do not locate the democratic insufficiency in representation, but rather I would like to hypothesize that injustices rise from the temporary permanence of representation or in other words in *legislators' temporary permanence*. By that I mean, that I do not perceive as an insult to a citizen or a direct source of alienation the embodiment of one's will in another person for several years through a parliamentary election. Instead, I perceive liberal democracy's injustice to be the usual absence of a direct control mechanism that would disrupt a government's *permanence* by ending its tenure, when the voter feels inadequately represented. In fact, I do locate the source of de facto power imbalances in favour of the elites precisely at the *permanence* of legislators for several years in between elections (four to five years usually), which empowers the efficiency of lobbying, propaganda, targeted party-financing and bribing. To consider the latter's essence, one should wonder which are the means in liberal democracy that bind politicians and parties to commit to pre-electoral promises that brought them to power in the first place? The answer is simply none; there is no *binding* mechanism that would force a politician to fulfil his promises or else to step down from power. The only such *non-binding* mechanism is the indirect control of a parliament. However, the few legislators of a parliament can be easily influenced by elites' financial power. The primary means of democratic manipulation by the elites, which leads to power imbalances, is propaganda, as the elites bear substantially stronger capacity than the poor to promote their ideas to

¹⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Ancient Greek Democracy And Its Importance For Us Today - Η Αρχαία Ελληνική Δημοκρατία Και Η Σημασία Της Για Μας Σήμερα* (Athens: Ύψιλον, 1999), 34.

the society (e.g. through private-held mass media). The second very important tool for the elites is lobbying, such as keeping close ties with politicians, financing parties or even bribing legislators, if necessary. In fact, sometimes the politicians themselves are part of the domestic elite. It is not a coincidence that incumbents in many liberal democratic countries are usually rich people and entrepreneurs, as usually they are the ones who can finance or seek peer-financing to propagate their electoral campaigns. Notably, elite propaganda is utilised mainly prior to elections, in order to distort the public sentiment and elect the politicians favoured by the elite. If we could mathematically graph propaganda with time, the levels of propaganda would spike prior to elections and would then drop again during the tenure of the government, when propaganda is necessary to maintain high re-election chances. On the other hand, lobbying is more essential after an election, as the relatively long period of a government's tenure (*temporary permanence*) allows the elites to influence politicians towards legislating elite-friendly policies. On top of that, many liberal democracies include even more complicated representation mechanisms, other than a single parliament, such as an additional senate, a congress, an elected President, which further reduces degrees of governmental control by the people. The more complicated the structure of representation, the less powerful the voters are in monitoring the government's compliance with its pre-electoral commitments to the people. In other words, in liberal democracy the people have no legitimate direct way of evaluating the government's performance after election, while their representatives in parliament, might be following their own personal or party agenda, or worse, they could be influenced financially by the domestic elite.

On the other hand, modern legislation is so complex that parliamentary representation indeed bears benefits to the efficient coordination of the collective will. However, the indirect government control through parliaments has proved extremely fragile to corruption and the economic power of elites, which allows them to increase their de facto political power within liberal democracy by manipulating the few legislators that constitute a parliament. The *temporary permanence* of legislators is a mechanism of major social injustices that should be corrected, without necessarily ousting the parliamentary system. In any case, any reform towards further democratization will take gradual steps that will meet the fierce opposition of elites, who favour less democratized societies. In other words, *a potential transcendence from liberal democracy to direct democracy seems to be an unrealistic utopia at this historical stage for most parts of the world*. Nevertheless, one should envisage small dialectical steps towards more autonomous societies that would remove the responsibility of governmental control from the parliament and would transfer it to the people. In fact, some societies have already taken such small, yet insufficient steps in that direction, such as Switzerland which has constituted a liberal democracy with the relatively frequent use of referendums. A gradual democratization path that would transform modern liberal democracies into referenda democracies similar to the Swiss political system, would indeed be a solid dialectic step forward towards more just and autonomous societies (autonomy here is used as defined by Castoriadis). To take the reflection one step further, inspired by Athenian democracy, societies should dialectically reach a point to consider direct *revocable voting* as an essential part of representative democracy, i.e. a voter's ability to revoke or reassign his vote directly

and immediately, when he or she feels misrepresented. The specifics of how revocable voting should rise in public and academic discourse with the aim of being instituted, as well as its pragmatic and theoretical challenges will be addressed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. At this point, I should only recall that the notion of revocability is today an essential part of the modern private sphere, with the most typical example being private sector employment. It is broadly accepted on the global level that an underperforming employee is sacked swiftly from his or her company in market economies, which dominate the globe. On the other hand, revocability remains a taboo for the public sphere and in particular for democracy, as governments are able to remain in power, even after substantial mistakes, whether those are intentional or not. I should remind that the power of a government after an election, is strictly subject to the will of the few legislators comprising a parliament. Nevertheless, those same legislators are directly affected by personal interests, party interests and the interests of the elites. The fewer the legislators the more powerful the elite, which necessitates the franchising of direct government control to the people.

Building on Hegelian dialectic, Francis Fukuyama suggests that the end of history has come with the institution of liberal democracy, as it has managed to eliminate all possible alternatives²⁰. Liberal democracy is undoubtedly the most inclusive political system to date, while its expansionary trajectory indeed confirms that there exists no major alternative to challenge the Western liberal status quo and its globalizing hegemony. That said, liberal democracy has indeed secured a privileged and position in the history of societies. However, major power imbalances and substantial

²⁰ Francis Fukuyama, *The End Of History And The Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

poverty are still a reality globally, including liberal Western nations, simply because representative parliamentarianism is politically instituted in a way that favours oligarchies. The end of history cannot be one of oligarchic hegemony, unregulated wealth accumulation, and human exploitation because the existing injustices will sooner or later plant reactionary seeds that will create the basis of a more substantial counter-hegemony. Unfortunately, the rise of far-right wing forces in the West, along with the rise of the Islamic State in the Middle East suggest that no one can ensure that this counter-hegemony will be democratic or non-violent, which in turn necessitates more than ever a progressive discourse towards further democratization, in order to protect democracy itself.

1.3 The “fifth path” of political development: towards a weaker democracy

It is important to clarify once again that elites would almost surely hold less de facto political power in a liberal democracy than in any non-democratic regime. Hence, it should be repeated that liberal democracy does constitute a political improvement over earlier non-democratic regimes towards more just political systems. In other words, the elites do compensate the sacrificed de jure political power after democratization by influencing the public and politicians (mainly through financial means, i.e. propaganda, bribing, etc.), which leads to holding higher de facto political power compared to the poorer parts of the society. However, in liberal democracies, it is unlikely that the elite would be able to compensate *the lost de jure power fully* and to regain the institutional strength that it used to hold during non-democracy. This happens because at least a small fraction of de facto political power remains at the hands of the poor, who exercise their voting rights on a periodic basis (every four to five years in

most liberal democracies at times of relative political stability). In a nutshell, this dissertation suggest that global power imbalances stem precisely from the long periodicity of voting rights in liberal democracies, what I called the *temporary permanence of legislators*, which allows the elites to take advantage of their disproportionate economic power within democracy in order to finance propaganda or to lobby with politicians. At the same time, the voters are unable to terminate the government's tenure, when they perceive a link between the domestic elite and the government, or simply when they feel misrepresented.

Liberal democracy and the high de facto political power of the elites compared to the poor within representative parliamentarianism, is of course not a static historical phenomenon, but rather a very dynamic one. In other words, the power of the elites differs from country to country at a given point in history, but it also differs within a specific region or between countries in different historical periods. Tracing the power of the elites within liberal democracy over the past decades, we notice that liberal democracy and free capital mobility are expanding globally, allowing international elites to coordinate more efficiently. I recall here that before the fall of the Berlin Wall, just 69 electoral democracies existed globally, which jumped to 99 by 1992 and to 125 in 2016.²¹ Most notably, according to the UN Human Development reports, in 1989 (the year of fall of the Wall), the richest 20% held 83% of global wealth, while in 2015 the richest 20% of the global population held 94% of global wealth²². Moreover, it is expected that in 2016, the richest 1% will hold more than 50% of global wealth. *The*

²¹ "Freedom House |", *Freedomhouse.Org*, 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/>.

²² "Human Development Reports | United Nations Development Programme", *Hdr.Undp.Org*, 2016, <http://hdr.undp.org/en>.

finding is simple; after the fall of the Berlin Wall liberal democracy expanded throughout the world, but at the same time the rich became richer!

If indeed the elites are a deciding factor of democratization (as argued earlier in the chapter) and given that the transition from non-democracy to democracy reduces their political power (even slightly), then why does liberal democracy continues its expansionary trajectory in 1989-2015 centuries across previously non-democratic nations? The reason is globalisation, which accelerated rapidly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Globalisation might contribute to democratization in a number of distinct ways. First, international financial integration means that capital owners, the elites, can more easily take their money out of a given country. This makes it more difficult to tax the elites and reduces the extent to which democracy can pursue populist and highly majoritarian policies. International financial integration, therefore, makes the elites feel more secure about democratic politics and discourages them from using repression to prevent a transition from non-democracy to democracy.²³

Acemoglu and Robinson argue that globalisation provides adequate economic incentives to elites to avoid preventing democratisation, simply because the governments are less able to impose policies that would reduce the elites' economic power. In any other case, the elites would have to invest capital in sustaining non-democracy that would come along with the costs of social discontent, unrest and continuous instability, thus damaging economic growth. In turn, they prefer to invest this capital in propaganda and lobbying with the governments within liberal democracy, this way increasing their de facto political power, while enjoying vast economic freedom, due to globalisation.

²³ Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson, *Economic Origins Of Dictatorship And Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 40.

Zygmunt Bauman endorses the political economic view of Acemoglu and Robinson. In fact, Bauman says that due to the unqualifiable and unstoppable spread of free trade, the economy is increasingly exempt from political control.²⁴ The economy is the area of the ‘non-political’ and anything left of politics is expected to be dealt, as in the old days (prior to globalization) by the state, but the state is not allowed to touch the economy. If a state does so, by introducing trade and capital barriers or Keynesian policies, it risks swift punitive action by the markets, according to Bauman. Economic sovereignty is a thing of the past in the globalized world, but to that we also need to aggregate the developments after the collapse of Communism, which were market by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The fall of Communism impacted liberal democracy in two distinct ways. The fall of Communism led many former communist states to become part of the expanding globalization project voluntarily and to succumb to global markets’ appetite, in order to enjoy the benefits of economic growth and investment.

There were now states which – far from being forced to give up their sovereign rights – actively and keenly sought to surrender them, and begged for their sovereignty to be taken away and dissolved in the supra-state formations. There were old or new nations escaping the federalist cages in which they have been incarcerated by the now extinct Communist super-power against their will – but only to use their newly acquired decision-making freedom to pursue dissolution of their political, economic and military independence in the European Market and NATO alliance.²⁵

After considering Bauman’s thoughts on globalisation and the willing submission of small nation-states to Western liberalism, I should recall that Acemoglu and Robinson, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, identify *four paths* of political

²⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 66.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

development. The first leads steadily from non-democracy to a long-standing stable democracy (case of Britain), the second leads from non-democracy to democracy, but then democracy collapses again resulting in a vicious loop of political transitions (case of Argentina). Moreover, the authors identify two non-democratic paths, where non-democracy prevails for a long period, either due to broad prosperity, which keeps the public's discontent against non-democracy contained (case of Singapore), or because of extremely powerful elites that oppress efficiently the weaker parts of the society (case of South Africa prior to the fall of the apartheid regime in 1994). The analysis of Acemoglu and Robinson traces political systems up to the late 20th century. Nevertheless, the advent of the 21st century after the fall of the Iron Curtain has enriched our understanding of political systems, while it confirms the gradual dominance of liberal democracy worldwide. Combining Acemoglu and Robinson's political economic methodology with Zygmunt Bauman's sociological work on globalization, *I hereby would like to propose schematically a fifth path of political development; one that leads from non-democracy to stable democracy (like in the first and the second), but then democracy disintegrates gradually, without however collapsing.* In other words, in the suggested *fifth path* of political transitions, democracy survives, as the elites do not bear adequate incentives to mount a coup, but at the same time, globalisation allows the elites to secure gradually rising de facto political influence within a country, due to the influence of global markets. I would further suggest, that the *fifth path* is ideally represented by most Western nation-states that used to be democratic *prior and after* the fall of the Berlin Wall (e.g. UK, France, Italy etc.). The *fifth path* is a theoretical extension of the first path, as identified by Acemoglu and

Robinson (case of Britain), but after aggregating the fall of Communism and the expanding globalization, which allowed the elites to transcend the barriers of nation-state sovereignty.

I would like to devote the last segment of this chapter into backing the *fifth path* theoretical extension to Acemoglu and Robinson's political economic theory, by parallelizing it with Zygmunt Bauman's theory of *interregnum*, and Colin Crouch's theory of *post-democracy*, as those will be analysed below. The two theorists (i.e. Bauman and Crouch) would agree that free capital mobility and global market power rose to the extent that government policies are not adequate to constrain elites within national borders any more. As a result, the unjust de facto political power that the elites used to hold prior to the fall of Communism, rose even further in the 21st century, as the governments are decreasingly likely to impose policies against the economic elites, in fear of global market penalties and isolation. The global finance is interested in a world of fragmented, weak nation-states, whose economic authority will be limited simply to balance the national budget, without touching upon the capital mobility and market liberty. The more the model of global economic flexibility and fluidity, the less power remains at the hands of government's, which either voluntarily or without even realizing have surrendered their authorities to the markets. Of course, the markets do not only comprise of private corporations and investors, but they are also supported by influential institutions, such as the central banks, the EU and the UN, which in many cases, lack the democratic legitimacy to influence global policy.

The domination of market-oriented, liberal democracies within an ever-deregulated global economy, leads to a vicious mechanism of withdrawing political

power from the poor and transferring it to the elites through even more direct means than those discussed earlier in this chapter (i.e. domestic elite influence). The elites now bear decreasing interest of influencing liberal democracy, as the fear of market isolation forces even left-leaning governments to impose market-friendly and elite-friendly policies to avoid economic penalties (e.g. through increased borrowing costs). In fact, even if governments want to act in favour of the poor, they risk devastating their countries by the markets, a very popular such case being the SYRIZA-led government in Greece in 2015. After the collapse of Communism, the markets bear even stronger incentives to isolate and make a paradigm out of government's who defy capital mobility and economic liberalisation. Such a behavior at the time of the Cold War, prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, would risk pushing a nation to the direct influence of the Soviet Union. As a result, politicians are now more than ever fully obliged to operate under a double-mind of trying to please the markets on the one hand, while also seeking to please voters. This political paradox has intrigued Zygmunt Bauman, who refers to the 21st century as an era of *interregnum*.²⁶ Bauman derives the term from Antonio Gramsci, who used it to describe a crisis as the period between the old dying and the new not being yet being born²⁷. Interregnum in Roman times used to designate the historical period between the death of the Roman ruler until the enthronement of the next ruler. If a Roman ruler died at a relatively old age, most inhabitants of the Roman empire would have lived solely under his rule and as a result, the change of ruler would be an entirely new situation, both for the citizens and the new ruler. Bauman believes

²⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, "Times Of Interregnum", *Ethics & Global Politics* 5, no. 1 (2012), <http://www.ethicsandglobalpolitics.net/index.php/egp/article/view/17200>.

²⁷ Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections From The Prison Notebooks Of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 276.

that what Gramsci called a period of *interregnum* is what the new generations will experience in the 21st century, due to a “divorce” between power and politics, which used for two centuries to reside in within the territorial nation-state, but were eventually separated by globalization. Politics has remained local, while power has become global.

Power has evaporated from the level of nation-state into the politics—free ‘space of flows’—to borrow Manuel Castells’ expression—leaving politics ensconced as before in the previously shared abode, now degraded to the ‘space of places’. The growing volume of power that matters (that is, the kind of power that has, if not the final say, then at least the major and, in the end, decisive influence on the setting of options open to agents’ choice) has already turned global; but politics has remained as local as before. Accordingly, the presently most relevant powers stay beyond the reach of extant political institutions, whereas the frame for manoeuvre in inner-state politics continues to shrink. The planetary state of affairs is now buffeted by ad hoc assemblies of discordant powers unconstrained by political control due to the increasing powerlessness of the extant political institutions. The latter are thereby forced to limit their ambitions severely and to ‘hive off’, ‘outsource’, or ‘contract out’ the growing number of functions traditionally entrusted to the governance of national governments to non-political agencies.²⁸

Bauman’s modern 21st century *interregnum* is in line with the *fifth path* of political development, as this was described earlier in this chapter, where I primary argue that liberal democracy has served as a convenient political platform for elites to push through the separation of power from politics. The *fifth path* and Bauman’s work on globalization are also very relevant to Colin Crouch’s theory of *post-democracy*, through which he describes the degradation of Western democracy as of the second half of the 20th century.

²⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, "Times Of Interregnum", *Ethics & Global Politics* 5, no. 1 (2012), <http://www.ethicsandglobalpolitics.net/index.php/egp/article/view/17200>.

The origins of the *post-democracy* according to Crouch can be traced to the middle of the 20th century, immediately after the WW2²⁹. Crouch explains that democracy reaches its peak right after a great political transition, when enthusiasm is widespread and when the system has not yet discovered how to manipulate the new demands³⁰. As a result, we can derive that liberal democracy was at its most egalitarian form right after WW2. That was a period after the greatest non-democratic projects (Fascism and Nazism) had been defeated, when it became evident that the welfare of the society was dependent on the population of wage-earning individuals. Such insights were evident even in the economic policies at the time following the postulate of John Maynard Keynes, as well as the dictums of mass production and mass consumption³¹. In order to ensure the survival of capitalism given the inequalities it produced, firms were subjected to the authority of national governments with limitations on their actions being evident. It was a form of a political economic compromise, between capitalists and working people. However, *post-democracy* emerged when elites realized that they could manipulate and manage more efficiently the masses, who were increasingly consumed by their daily businesses. With time, issues in the political arena became more complex and the masses found it hard to know which side to take or which policies to support. Debates pertaining public elections and policy agenda became closely managed by teams and groups of professional individuals and experts that could persuade the masses in to believing their opinions as indubitable. Therefore, participation of the masses in political debates declined, while even voting was

²⁹ Colin Crouch, *Coping With Post-Democracy* (London: Fabian Society, 2000), 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

approached with apathy, leading to a politically passive citizenry. The latter is highly attributed to media propaganda and the new modern-life consumerism in the West, which is again promoted by global corporations. Thus, in the contemporary age - especially after the end of the Cold War- the opinions of citizens to decide the political agenda have been replaced by large globalized firms. In fact, globalization allowed firms to control and influence policies in most countries, which are part of the global market economy³². In many scenarios, they dictate the trend of regulatory and fiscal regimes, threatening to withdraw their support if their demands are not adhered to.

Post-democracy is characterised by extensive use of capital from corporate firms in election campaigns because they seek to support a certain regime that will respect their interests³³. Moreover, it has led to a new system of lobbying characterized by corporate alliances that seek to place their influence on certain issues such as lower corporate taxes, privatization, labour deregulation that will maximize their profits. With time, such tendencies lead to the fading away of the influence of institutions of democracy, with economics being the main subject behind policies and alliances³⁴. Political parties have become dependent on economic interests rather than the electorate and slowly abandon policies that may improve social welfare³⁵. If the corporate elites do not agree with the policies they will threaten to go elsewhere, while the mass population is rooted to the nation state, having to obey laws and taxes, what Bauman calls otherwise globalization versus localization³⁶. Crouch summarizes the effects of

³² Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2004), 57.

³³ Wolfgang Merkel, "Is There A Crisis Of Democracy?", *Annual Meeting Of The American Political Science Association*, 2013, 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 9-26.

globalization and the influence of the elites on liberal democracy in a cohesive, simple, yet powerful argument; since the success of corporations depends on their ability to maximize value for the firms' shareholders, entrepreneurs and company managers must be expected to use their access to politicians and civil servants for the benefit of their corporations.³⁷

Both Bauman and Crouch acknowledge that lobbying and the direct influence of elites over politicians is not the only way of distorting democracy and as a result they devote considerable amount of their work on means of media domination and mass propaganda. Crouch believes that a critical moment for *post-democracy* was the development of the advertising industry after WW2 and the involvement of advertising in politics.

Taken by surprise, first by the demand for, then by the reality of, democracy, politicians struggled for the first part of the 20th century to find means of addressing the new mass public. For a period it seemed that only men like Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin had discovered the secret of power through mass communication. Democratic politicians were placed on roughly equal discursive terms with their electorates through the clumsiness of their attempts at mass speech. Then the US advertising industry began to develop its skills, with a particular boost coming from the development of commercial television. The persuasion business was born as a profession. By far the dominant part of this remained devoted to the art of selling goods and services, but politics and other users of persuasion tagged along eagerly behind, extrapolating from the innovations of the advertising industry and making themselves as analogous as possible to the business of selling products so that they could reap maximum advantage from the new techniques. (...) Advertising is not a form of rational dialogue. It does not build up a case based on evidence, but associates its products with a particular imagery. You cannot answer it back. Its aim is not to engage in discussion but to persuade to buy. Adoption of its methods has helped

³⁷ Colin Crouch, *Coping With Post-Democracy* (London: Fabian Society, 2000), 19.

politicians to cope with the problem of communicating to a mass public; but it has not served the cause of democracy itself³⁸.

Crouch's view on the political impact of advertising reminds us of Bauman's referral to the *Synopticon*, a power mechanism identified by Thomas Mathiesen that emerged in the second half of the 20th century with the emergence of new technologies and media. Unlike previous power mechanisms, the Synopticon is not coercive, but it rather seduces the few to watch the many by following the mainstream media and trying to immitate the promoted lifestyle of depoliticization and consumerism. Mathiessen argues that it is predominantly the institutional elites who have access to the media to express their views and propagate their ideas; mainly male population, coming from the highest social strata and bearing influence over politics, private industry and the public sector³⁹. Media allow the globals to seduce the locals into their lifestyle and attract support for their interests, according to Bauman, who is on top very skeptic about the immediate access that the authorities have gained into peoples private lives through new technologies. The latter allows the enforcement a parallel domination mechanism to the Synopticon, the *Panopticon*, which achieves social obedience through the fear of being watched. The Panopticon was Jeremy Bentham's theoretical architectural design, where all inmates of an institution can be watched by a single watchman, without knowing if they are being watched or not. The latter obliges inmates to behave according to rules, even though the watchman obviously cannot observe all of them at the same time. The Panopticon reemerged in academia as part of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*⁴⁰, where he tried to analyse modern types of social domination and redistribution

³⁸ Colin Crouch, *Coping With Post-Democracy* (London: Fabian Society, 2000), 10-11.

³⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 53.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline And Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

of controlling powers. The Panopticon, as a domination mechanism will regain much greater importance in the 21st century, after the exposure by whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2014 of US and UK's government-led mass surveillance informational systems. Bauman contends that whereas in the Synopticon the many watch the few through mass media, in the Panopticon the few watch the many through electronic surveillance, achieving remarkable social domination through both seductive and coercive methods.

Despite their remarkable critique on globalisation and social inequalities Crouch and Bauman do not engage extensively into providing answers or solutions, but rather limit themselves in locating the source of inequalities and injustices. In fact, the sophistication of power domination mechanisms, along with the power of the elites withing globalization, led Bauman to become very pessimistic about the chances of collective action against elitism. The new global freedom of movement makes it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to re-forge social issues into effective collective action, Bauman says in particular.⁴¹ The 21st century should be a century where younger generations should attempt to propose ways of remarrying power and politics, Bauman publicly said in one of his academic speeches in 2010. Chapter 2 of this dissertation will try to address Bauman's suggestion through discussion the future of a democratization struggle with the aim of instituting revocable voting within liberal representative democracy, as a small, yet essential dialectical step, of limiting the power of the elites.

⁴¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 69.

Chapter 2: Radical democracy and the revocable vote

“Revolution does not mean torrents of blood, the taking of the Winter Palace, and so on. Revolution means a radical transformation of society's institutions. In this sense, I certainly am a revolutionary.”

Cornelius Castoriadis

2.1 Introduction

As already discussed in Chapter 1, democratisation in the 20th century was the outcome of multiple social struggles, but eventually took place under the consent and influence of the elites. This hegemonic interplay between elites and the poor had a profound impact on the idea and conception of *liberty*. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe recall that for traditional liberalism since Locke, liberty meant freedom from the violence of others, to which by John Stuart Mill the acceptance of political liberty and democratic participation was incorporated.¹ For the social-democratic front, by early 20th century, the concept of liberty was transformed in such a way that poverty, lack of education or basic welfare was considered a direct offence against one's liberty. However, the *neo-conservative* or *neo-liberal* (in general the neo-right) ideology has become hegemonic globally since late 20th century and has eventually achieved to question the earlier conceptions of liberty. In fact, the neo-right attacks statism and the formation of the Welfare State, with Hayek, Friedman, Nozick and Fukuyama being some of the most prominent proponents since the early 20th century. All state intervention other than actions for issues that cannot be regulated by the markets is considered by neo-liberals as a direct offense to individual liberty. For neo-liberals the

¹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony And Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), 172.

definition of individual liberty excludes political liberties and regards almost solely one's undisturbed access to private property rights with minimum or if possible zero state intervention. Laclau and Mouffe warn that neglecting or underestimating the importance of such attempts to redefine the notion of liberty, equality and justice at the political philosophic level bears substantial risks that might have considerable consequences at the collective conscience of the masses.² The new conservatism has succeeded in presenting its ideology of dismantling the Welfare State (especially after the end of the Cold War) as a defence of individual liberties against the *oppressor state*, Laclau and Mouffe warn.³ Therefore, we are witnessing the emergence of a new hegemonic project, that of liberal-conservative discourse, which seeks to articulate the neo-liberal defence of the free market economy with the profoundly anti-egalitarian culture of conservatism.

2.2 The revocable vote

The *revocable vote* was introduced briefly in Chapter 1, as a remedy to *legislators' temporary permanence*, which allows the elites to influence political decision-making through illegitimate means, such as media propaganda, lobbying and bribing and in general by exerting their disproportionate economic force onto politics. In Chapter 2, I would like to elaborate on the revocable vote by incorporating the theories of Antonio Gramsci and Chantal Mouffe into the discussion on the importance of further democratisation beyond liberal democracy, as the primary strategic path towards curbing global financial imbalances and containing the power of oligarchs. In

² Ibid., 174.

³ Ibid., 175.

this context, the *revocable vote* will be introduced as a potential contemporary step and as part of the Gramscian *war of position* that the poor need to launch against the elites, as well as part of the necessary efforts towards Mouffe's *radical democracy* (i.e. agonistic democracy) vision.

Before moving further, the revocable vote should be reintroduced to the reader. As explained earlier in this dissertation, *en masse revocable voting* entails voter's ability to revoke or reassign his or her vote directly, when he or she feels misrepresented by the legislators. Revoking a vote should be taking place without the intervention of any indirect form of democratic institutions, such as a parliament or a senate. The revocable vote is process envisioned to be incorporated within representative parliamentary democracy and transforming it in a more direct form of democracy without ousting the concept of representation. As argued in Chapter 1, political power imbalances lie in the *legislators' temporary permanence* between elections, rather than to the fact that legislators are elected by the people in the first place. It is peoples' inability to influence the legislators' decisions after the election date that allows the elites to influence legislators via non-democratic means and shift policies in their favour. Quoting the relevant segment in Chapter 1: "I should only recall that the notion of revocability is today an essential part of the modern private sphere, the most typical example being private sector employment. It is broadly accepted on the global level that an underperforming employee is sacked swiftly from his or her company in market economies, which dominate the globe. On the other hand, revocability remains a taboo for the public sphere and in particular for democracy, as governments are able to remain in power, even after substantial mistakes, whether those are intentional or not. I should

remind that the power of a government after the election, is strictly subject to the will of the few legislators comprising a parliament. Nevertheless, those same legislators are directly affected by personal interests, party interests and the interests of the elites. The fewer the legislators the more powerful the elite, which necessitates the franchising of direct government control to the people.”

We should begin by tracing historically the notion of *revocability* within political systems. *Revocability* of delegates is a known electoral concept since the ancient Athenian democracy.⁴ Karl Marx also praised the Parisian Commune for adopting the notion of *revocability* in its decisions, while revocability was also present in election of delegate the Soviet workers’ councils prior to their subordination to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Finally, forms of revocability have also been recorded in workers’ councils in Italy and Germany in 1920-1921 and in within the context of US and Swiss democracies, while some forms of revocability have also been recorded in Canada, Ukraine and Venezuela. What we call today a recall election or recall referendum has been applied in the US since 1631 and in Switzerland since 1846. A recall election differs from *en masse revocable voting*, in the sense that it consists of collecting signatures with the aim of recalling a delegate either directly or through a referendum. On the other hand, the *revocable vote*, as introduced in this dissertation, consists of the direct revoking by the voter of a parliamentary vote (including parties and delegates). A considerable amount of revocation would eventually lead the government to fall.

⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Ancient Greek Democracy And Its Importance For Us Today - Η Αρχαία Ελληνική Δημοκρατία Και Η Σημασία Της Για Μας Σήμερα* (Athens: Ύψιλον, 1999), 39.

Since the revocable vote is a concept almost newly introduced in this dissertation, I would like to elaborate on the theoretical specifics, without however going deep into pragmatic details that go beyond the purpose of this study. That said, *the revocable vote is envisaged as a radical addition to existing democracies, but does not constitute an idea for a completely new democratic system.* As we know, in liberal democracies the executive and legislative powers lies either at the hands of a President or Prime Minister (or of both) and to the decisions of a national Parliament or a Senate (or of both,) depending on each different political system. In most current political systems collecting a bit more than 40% of the public vote is adequate to form an independent government. *The revocable vote would take effect after elections and the after formation of a government, which is ratified by the parliament. After the enforcement of the revocable vote a citizen would be allowed to revoke and immediately reassign his initial vote to another party/president/delegate. This would lead to a dynamic democracy, where the government would constantly have to sustain a specified majority across the voters to remain on power and to be allowed to legislate its desired policies. It is important to note that all voters would be allowed to revoke and reassign their votes, including opposition party voters, who could reassign their votes to the government to enforce its policy agenda. In case, an adequate number of government voters reassign their votes to opposition parties, without the same number of opposition voters reassigning their votes to the government, then the government falls and the country heads to national elections. I should stress here that the revocable vote does not regard individual delegates, but the revoking of a full administration. That said, the power of controlling a government is removed by the parliament to the hands of the*

voters. *If a government maintains power throughout its official tenure (four to five years), then national elections should take place as usual.*

Revocable voting is envisaged to be continuous from the first day of the a government formation. However, there are many variations that one could introduce to the model of *democracy with revocable voting*. For example, every government could have a grace period after elections (e.g. six months), or revocability could take place only at certain periods of a government's tenure (e.g. once per six months) and not continuously, which would reduce destabilisation risks. However, discussing such variations exceeds the scope of this dissertation, which aims shedding light at the principles of revocable voting, not the technical or pragmatic specifics. I should only say briefly that technological advancement has reached such levels that voters' anonymity and costs of frequent elections, under a democracy with revocable voting, should not be of concern. That said, we have ways of protecting the anonymity of voters, when it comes to revocable voting, while election costs at the age of Internet should be minimized through fast and easy anonymous electronic voting.

Revocable voting is admittedly a radical idea, but it is a democratic idea. It prioritizes equal democratic participation and political involvement as the primary right and obligation of every citizen. However, given that the revocable vote is a concept that targets reducing the power of oligarchies, it would not be welcomed by the elites. Let us remember, how unwelcome once sounded ideas such as abolishing slavery, granting voting rights to the poor or franchising democracy to women, who were excluded from voting across the world until the early 20th century. Moreover, like many radical ideas in the past, the right to revoke a government indeed sounds strange or unpractical and

that is why this dissertation will examine below some of the benefits of revocable voting, as well as some of the probable criticisms.

It has been argued earlier in this dissertation that we live in a world of a conservative liberal hegemony that is becoming gradually stronger through the expansion of liberal democracy and globalisation. The rise of this hegemony is in the hands of corporatocratic elites that hold disproportional de facto political power, due to their ability to influence liberal democratic institutions. In turn, the Left and the poor are still organising their struggle on the traditional socialist approach of prioritising their social requests with respect to wealth imbalances, targeting specific economic policy decisions and, to a great extent, neglecting that wealth imbalances are directly the result of political injustice. The revocable vote is an idea that targets providing the poor and the intellectuals with the right theoretical tools to reorganize their struggle and combat social injustices at the root of the problem, which is the elitism of politics. Think of a normal citizen; does he or she hold the same political power with a TV channel owner or the owner of a big bank or an oil tycoon, even though they all might be citizens of the same state? Well, according to liberal democracy they all hold equal democratic power, which they can exercise once every four or five years with their vote. In theory, all citizens hold equal de jure political power through voting. In practice though, the oligarchs hold all means possible (propaganda, lobbying, bribing) to impose their interests on politicians over the four to five-year tenure of the elected government. On the other hand, the simple citizen can do nothing but wait until the next election, where under immense propaganda pressure he or she will be called to cast a vote again. The poor and the Left need to prioritise reallocating their resources into combating the

political power of the elites, as the social struggle for wealth redistribution is vain, without addressing the source of such imbalances, which is political elitism. The revocable vote aims exactly at addressing political injustices and equip the hands of the poor with stronger political power. I should note here that the revocable vote does not only bear collective social implications, but also existential implications on the subject. The latter will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Let us now address the advantages of an en masse revocable voting democracy, when comparing it to the outstanding known models of liberal democracy. I will start with the most important deficiency of liberal democracy, *legislators' temporary permanence*, which simply means that a politician can promise a certain number of policies, without being directly accountable for their implementation after election. In fact, he or she can be elected and implement the exact opposite policies with some – usually – unfounded political excuse. The parliament is an inadequate control mechanism of politicians' political consistency, as usually the government holds a majority and individual delegates, usually do not diverge from their party's official line. In a nutshell, *direct political accountability* is absent from liberal democracy. The latter is the source of a series of undemocratic evils within representative democracy; propaganda, bribing, lobbying or simply making political mistakes as a legislator without being directly accountable for them.

Beginning with propaganda, we already know that the elites control a vast of amount of resources that they could invest prior to elections to influence the voters' choice. This means that not only voters come to the ballot rarely, but they are also obliged to make a crucial long-term choice under the influence of heavy elitist

propaganda. Quoting again Chapter 1: “If we could mathematically graph propaganda with time, the levels of propaganda would spike prior to elections and would then drop again during the tenure of the government, when lower levels of propaganda are necessary to maintain strong re-election chances.” However, *a revocable voting democracy would prevent this phenomenon*. Revocable voting would reduce elites’ incentive in investing so many resources in pre-election campaigns, as any administration could be revoked at any time. One would fairly argue that average propaganda levels would rise in the long-run, but they would almost surely not reach the usual extremely high pre-election levels, as this would not be financially sustainable for the elites. Moreover, even with elevated average propaganda levels, we need to understand that a society, that would be politically engaged constantly (through the revocable vote), would become a trained receptor of propaganda and would adjust accordingly. In the end, *revocable voting would reduce the effectiveness of propaganda in affecting policy in favour of the elites*, without of course eradicating propaganda fully. Still, a more politically engaged society would adapt more efficiently and would eventually make wiser political choices with time.

Bribing (indirect or direct) and lobbying, belong to the same category of shady acts that the elite can adopt when it wishes to influence politicians. However, they both come with costs. Would the elite be willing to assume those costs, if it knew that a government could be immediately revoked at any time of its tenure. The revocable vote once again, like in the case of propaganda, would reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of bribing and lobbying, without however eradicating it. Most importantly, under a revocable vote democracy corruption scandals would now be at

the discretion of the people and not of the parliament, through which corrupted legislators usually find ways to avoid the retributions for corruption acts.

The revocable vote is not only a democratic protective valve against elitism and corrupted politicians. Politicians and governments, even if not corrupted, are not all wise and they certainly do make mistakes, over which sometimes they escape accountability by unfounded clarifications. Judging the validity of such clarifications after a mistake, or even the ability to foresee an upcoming mistake, should lie at the hands of the people, who are in the end the subjects of all policies. Democracy is founded in an aristocratic way, where politicians are allegedly wiser than the masses. Well, even if the latter is the case, the will of the people should transcend the wisdom of politicians, if wisdom is not communicated convincingly to the people. On the other hand, if we believe that adults are not adequately capable to make credible political decisions, then why do they vote in the first place? The revocable vote is a democratic tool that would franchise political power to the people. Several times we have witnessed politicians making substantial political mistakes and remaining on power until the next election, simply because the people have no say over politicians' or government decision for several years. *Periodical voting is aristocratic, elitist and unjust!*

Crises (economic, political etc.) is yet another element of democracy where the revocable vote would contribute to less aristocratic and more popular decisions that would reflect the peoples' will. In most cases, a crisis emerges amidst a government's tenure. However, this government was elected under different circumstances and does not always bear the democratic legitimacy to make decisions at times of crisis. Some governments have the political honesty to call for snap elections in case of a crisis or to

call a referendum. But in many cases, governments unilaterally assume the legitimacy to act at times of emergencies, based on a vote they received months or years ago. In worse cases, governments even manipulate the events of a crisis to achieve political gains. The *state of emergency* is a common excuse that governments are utilizing to cease democracy and to make decisions without considering peoples' will, which is yet another factor that renders contemporary democracy an elitist political system.

Of course, the revocable vote does not only bear benefits and would come at costs. The primary one is the risk of multiple consecutive elections, in case people decide to revoke government's too frequently. However, there are remedies to this problem, by introducing for example brief grace periods of few months) after the election of a government, or by allowing people to revoke their vote periodically, as discussed earlier. Also, democracy is a social system of mostly rational agents and as such, even after a brief period of destabilisation, it would tend towards reaching an equilibrium or equilibria. In the end, people would be displeased with a potential prolonged destabilisation and would begin to utilise their revocable vote right wisely (if at all) across longer interims. Over the same period, politicians would be trained to the fact that if they lie or do not deliver to their promises and fail to explain why the people, they would be facing the risk of being revoked. *The latter would cause a virtuous cycle of gradually more honest politicians and in turn of citizens, who would have a decreasing need to revoke politicians, as long as they make sound pre-elections promises and stick to them.* Of course, a government cannot always anticipate the circumstances of its tenure. If those change and it cannot deliver its promises, it would either have to call snap elections or explain to the people, why they should not revoke

it. If the explanations are convincing, revocation would be avoided, but this would still be the outcome of a dialectical democratic process between the rulers and the ruled. *I should stress here that in the hypothetical case that people do not use their revocable vote right at all, we would be back at the contemporary representative democratic model that we know so far.* That said, the revocable vote is a direct democratic addition to representative democracy not a reform that changes the essence of democracy. *Even though political participation of a conscious citizen is an obligation and a right in my view, the revocable vote would be a right, but not necessarily an obligation.* In the end, a government's deeds might be righteous and the voters would choose not to revoke it, thus not destabilising the political system. The revocable vote would be an incentive for honest policies and a threat for dishonest governments.

Another anticipated criticism to the revocable vote would be to claim that with revocable voting politicians would only campaign for short-term policies, as long-term policies are sometimes miscomprehended by the people, or that politicians would not be able to push some necessary unpopular reforms in fear of being revoked. Well if we are to have democracy, the policies that are to be implemented need by definition to be popular. If the majority is unhappy with a certain policy, no matter how necessary that policy might be, then it shall not pass. Assuming that the people are less intelligent or hold weaker expertise than politicians is a common claim, and in fact it might be true. But allowing politicians to legislate against the will of the people is again aristocratic and far from being democratic. If the people are not wise enough to allow a beneficial policy to pass, so be it! They need to assume political responsibility, exercise their political rights and bear the consequences of their decisions. This is the definition of

democracy! Not the rule of some all wise political aristocracy that makes the right decisions for the people irrespective of their wishes. In the end, politicians should be the representatives of the people, not their rulers and revocability would be an essential tool to restore, at least partially, the political balance between the elites and the poor in modern democracies.

One would wonder, why this direct democratic reform should be implemented through the revocable vote and not via a referendum democracy, similar to the Swiss model. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Swiss model does constitute an improvement over the majority of most known liberal democracies, as it achieves the broad democratic inclusion, while people are called to the ballot several times in a year. However, referendum democracy still suffers from the deficiencies of *permanence*, i.e. once a referendum vote is casted, it usually bears long-term consequences without the ability of a revoking a certain decision, once it has been taken. As a result, the power of pre-referendum propaganda remains extremely powerful, as long as a referendum decision is non-revocable. Quoting from Chapter 1 and the Swiss model: “referendum democracy would lack the dynamic element of direct democracy, where legislators (and consequently policies) would constantly be evaluated by the people and could be revoked at any time of a government’s tenure. That said, the elites would still hold disproportionate de facto political power in a referendum democracy, as they would bear incentives to invest substantial capital in influencing a referendum decision prior to the vote through propaganda or bribing. In particular, the power of propaganda remains extremely strong in a referendum democracy, as the likely *permanence* of any referendum decision for a substantial period, allows considerable manipulation by the

elites, which in most cases controls the dominant media and communication means in a market economy. On top of that, politicians (and hence elites) still bear relative freedom in a referendum democracy to ignore an “undesirable” referendum decision, only by proceeding with minor adjustments. A popular case is the well-known Greek referendum in 2015 in Greece, when the people voted against a bailout agreement with the EU, but the government still accepted a new bailout, only with minor adjustment on the initial proposal, which Greek people turned down in the first place! On the other hand, bribing politicians is less powerful in a referendum democracy, as the tenure of a government and its policies can be interrupted by a referendum and hence the elite’s investment on bribing can go to waste. Moreover, bribing substantial part of the voters at the time of a referendum (normally all adult populations) can be extremely expensive for the elite, and hence inefficient. That said, the relatively high efficiency of propaganda and politicians’ freedom to tweak the referendum’s outcome are the major deficiencies of referendum democracy compared to more direct democratic forms of governances, such as revocable voting.

Before concluding this segment on the revocable vote, I would like to cite a very significant dialogue between my two main inspirations Chantal Mouffe and Cornelius Castoriadis from December 1994, when Castoriadis was still a Professor in Sorbonne in Paris and Mouffe, who at the time was part of the political team MAUSS (Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales)⁵. I recall briefly that Castoriadis was a great proponent of the revocability of legislators, without however favouring my view that revocability could be incorporated in representative democracy,

⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, *Democracy And Relativity - Δημοκρατία Και Σχετικισμός* (Athens: Στάσει Εκπύπτοντες, 2015), 7.

as I am arguing in this dissertation. In the discussion, that I will cite just below, Mouffe and Castoriadis agree on the necessity of a radical direct democracy, but openly disagree on the potential implications that a majoritarian direct democracy would bear on minorities. In an effort to defend partially modern representative democracy, Mouffe begins the argument by claiming: “There is no other democracy, other than direct democracy, agreed; but does democracy protect individual liberties? So, in order to protect individual liberties, shouldn’t there be next to democratic institutions other institutions parallel to democracy related to pluralism? In the end, Switzerland has achieved the most democratic regime, but this does not prevent it from making extremely troubled decisions in relation to immigration. If your position is that more democracy would necessarily lead to the right decisions, then I do not agree with you on that.”⁶ The ideal institution remains a mixed regime of direct democracy with some constitutional protection of minorities, according to Mouffe. Castoriadis’s response to Mouffe was as follows:

Do you [Chantal Mouffe] suggest that we should have a Constitution that cannot be revised under any circumstances? Of course, we cannot do that. The idea of a non-revisable Constitution is practically and logically non-sense. In the same way you cannot forbid the Swiss people to limit migration inflows with a referendum, in the same way you cannot forbid the people from saying (I will say something intentionally stupid here): ‘We remove voting rights from people with height below 160cm and above the height of 190cm’. The majority here surely falls between the 160-190cm height, so they could in theory adopt this prohibition in a majoritarian democracy. What can one do? I would of course personally oppose this amendment and I would fight against it. If we accept the rule of the majority, we also accept necessarily, despite all guarantees, that there is always the chance that people will go crazy and might do one thing or the other. Hitler came to power in a way by a majority. What should we do then? Forbid German people to vote? This is the evolution

⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

of history. We can fight against wrong democratic decisions, but we cannot limit democracy through judicial amendments.⁷

Both sides present valid arguments, but I will take the side of Castoriadis in this theoretical “dispute”. In fact, I believe that Castoriadis’s simple response to Mouffe summarises the essence of what I tried to present through the revocable voting democracy proposal earlier in this chapter.

2.3 The future of the revocable vote

The revocable vote would not be a welcome reform for the elites. Let us not forget how negatively the media and politicians currently perceive the crucial referendums that are conducted across the globe; as if peoples’ view or opinion is inferior, which is a highly undemocratic mentality. Moreover, elections are still perceived by the establishment as a destabilising period for every country. This dissertation argued that it would take a Gramscian *war of position* and substantial social efforts by the intelligentsia, that supports the poor, to introduce the idea of further democratisation to the societies, in an effort to overturn political and consequently economic inequality. Why introduce the need for a more direct democracy? Because the social struggles of the poor in favour of wealth redistribution have failed substantially, while in the current globalised environment, the space for a more radical economic struggle seems extremely limited, if not hopeless. On the other hand, democratisation is a field that could unite broader social groups under a common struggle, including part of the middle class that believes in more just societies. It is assumed here that the political choices of

⁷ Ibid., 103-104.

the middle class are not strictly economically-oriented. However, we cannot disregard the fact that economic inequality persists, partially because the middle classes have granted their consent to the elites, which in Gramscian terms eventually led to the formation of the cultural hegemony of the bourgeoisie in the early 20th century. In fact, this hegemony became even more powerful on a global scale after the end of the Cold War, due to the lack of alternatives to globalised capitalism, as argued earlier in this chapter.

Gramsci argued that the basis for socioeconomic and political domination was mostly the cultural hegemony of the ruling class. As a result, Mouffe analysed, along with Ernesto Laclau, Gramsci's cultural hegemony and its post-modern socioeconomic implication in their cornerstone book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, where they also sketched their theory of radical democracy⁸. Laclau and Mouffe explain that deliberative democracy attempts to aggregate views, which suppresses social differences and views. As a result, the relations of oppression and exploitation are disguised. On the other hand, radical democracy would build upon pluralism, social differences and antagonisms, try to shed light in oppressive inequality and to challenge the ruling classes.

Mouffe criticizes consistently the western neoliberal worldview, which marginalizes traditional politics (left against right, socialism against liberalism) and aims to implement a one-sided and dubious dogma of social and global unity stemming from the universality of inadequately defined human rights. In other words, Mouffe tries to deconstruct the neoliberal morality and reintroduce the importance of conflict in

⁸ Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy*. London: Verso.

politics to facilitate the smooth operation of democracy. Neoliberalism, expressed through either conservative or social democratic political powers, aims to shatter any expression of class-consciousness or conflict, marginalizing collective identity and any existing political, social or philosophical differences between different social groups. Neoliberal forces strive to build upon banal universal ideologies, through which they aim to ban any radical conflict or reaction. As a result, neoliberalism dismisses original politics, as inefficient, redundant, irrational and eventually damaging for democracy, according to Mouffe, replacing the right-left conflict with a moralistic distinction of good and bad.

Mouffe sees significant risks in the marginalization of the *political* from social life, as the latent social conflicts would be expressed more violently in other spaces of public life. Moreover, Mouffe argues that any radical reaction against democracy (e.g. religious fundamentalism) should be confronted only within the political space dialectically, as the moralistic degradation of such movements does not necessarily protect democracy. On the other hand, it makes democracy fragile from the inside, meaning from the neoliberal proponents of a type of new-order meretricious peace and social cohesiveness. Most importantly, in sight of the so-called economic stability, the hegemonic classes approach elections or referendums as the outmost disturbing evil, calling for the formation of broad coalitions or emergency governments at times of crises.

Mouffe's primary target is to bring again forward the *political* in the public sphere, aiming to benefit democracy. In that path, despite the deep ideological objections with the anti-liberal and anti-parliamentary theory of Schmitt, Mouffe utilizes his *friend and*

enemy methodology to argue in favour of democracy and against the post-modern threats of neoliberal republicanism, which hide ideological differences in Western societies behind a fake curtain of peaceful resolution. In particular, Mouffe suggests the replacement of Schmitt's *enemy* with the term political opponent. That said, Mouffe envisages the conflict between democratic political opponents being resolved dialectically within the boundaries of contemporary democracy. According to Mouffe, such conflicts will revitalize democracy, against the dangerous and fake social homogeneity that neoliberalism tries to propagate, behind which is hidden the ideology of globalization, of the markets and of consumerism.

Mouffe does not accept either the a priori superiority of the rationality or positivism of western political institutions or the universal global morality of liberalism, which dismisses any opposing view as backward or obsolete. On the other hand, Mouffe explains that the dogmatic interpretation of Enlightenment is the result of capitalism in modernity. Thereafter, neoliberalism's absolute negation of *the other* or of any other ideology other than its supposed unifying dogma, has gradually managed to shrink the *political*. However, social conflict exists within society, despite the financial driven utopia of the neoliberal unifying dogma. As a result, the only way to resolve the existing social conflict is through the political sphere, as its suppression or disguise can only harm democracy and fuel radical violent conflicts in the future, according to Mouffe.

The question rises naturally; how could political theory revert the process of the dominant consensus politics in liberal democracy, which eventually facilitates the hegemony of neoliberalism? Few minds in the world can consider an alternative to the current world order and here I will agree with Mouffe, Hardt & Negri that a response

cannot be scattered, as it would be suppressed by the forces of globalisation. Mouffe, partly by echoing the Marxist views of social constant and historical class struggle, explains that democracy can only mean a constant form of agonism. However, unlike the violent revolutionary elements of Marxist class struggle, agonism takes place within a democratic platform, it stems from the mutual respect of the adversaries, while domination over the other party is not its sole purpose. Mouffe asks for conflicts to be brought to the surface, rather than to be hidden behind the meretricious social equilibrium that neoliberal political powers try to impose through modern liberal democracy. Simply, Mouffe calls for a modern political *war of position*.

That being said, the revocable vote is introduced in this dissertation as an idea for such *war of position* that would be applicable to the broader spectrum of Western representative democracies, with the aim of reducing the de facto political power of the elites. *The role of the middle class is key towards any effort of reducing global inequalities, as well as key to the prospects of success of any political or economic struggle.* The revocable vote can unite the lower social strata and part of the middle class against elitism and in favour of democratisation, strengthening the prospects of a radical democracy and of a counter-hegemony, as envisaged by Mouffe, since the unification of the poor and the middle classes has failed profoundly on the basis of economic platforms.

Chapter 3: The existential importance of direct democracy

"The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion."

Albert Camus

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, I built upon the discussion on the fragility of representative democracy to elitism that was initially introduced in Chapter 1. Criticizing liberal democracy from the point of view of lower social strata, i.e. the poor, I introduced in detail the works of Chantal Mouffe on Gramsci, on *hegemony* and in particular on the cultural hegemony of the bourgeoisie. With the view of bringing forward Gramsci's idea of *war of position* and Mouffe's ideas of *agonistic pluralism* and *radical democracy*, I introduced *revocable voting* as a pragmatic reform to contemporary representative democracy. The role of intellectuals in propagating new radical ideas of democratisation that would favour the poor, by achieving broader coalition between the poor and the middle classes, was also discussed. However, this discussion was focused on a collective macro-political level, that admittedly neglects elements of the subject.

In Chapter 3, I aim to discuss the impact of a new radical democratic project (such as the revocable vote) on the self. Such drastic political reforms cannot only be considered at the collective level, but also at the individual existentialist level, in order to achieve a thorough study. *The main goal of this chapter is to conclude this dissertation with a political existentialist project that would argue in favour of politicization, as a remedy to modern-life alienation and the long-standing absurdity of life and fear of death.* It will be argued that the existential anguish would ease

considerably, if societies return to more communal structures with stronger and more active political participation. The road to *authenticity* (in Heideggerian terms) passes through politics and through the human subject's responsible assumption of its political obligations, as well as through claiming its political rights. In that direction, the only path propagating communality (even in a large scale) and solidarity, as well as combatting elitism and political alienation, is a path of more direct forms of democracy. The exploration of the importance of political identity to the self should start with a brief of overview of existentialism.

3.2 Political existentialism

Heading towards the end of this dissertation, we now need to put everything together, i.e. the collective and the subject. We live in globalised (or globalising), highly consumerist societies, where economic borders and labour rights are gradually being shattered, while representative democracy gradually takes over the political space hegemonically on a global scale. The latter as it has already been argued is not an exclusively negative development, when considering that representative democracy is replacing previously authoritarian regimes. However, the contemporary form of democracy still bears substantial amounts of elitism and fragility to corruption, while the poor are being excluded from *the political*. Such exclusions alienate the individual and depoliticise societies as wholes, leading to more impersonal social structures. On top of that, the existentialist predicament imposes insurmountable stress and anxiety on the individual, in sight of death, futility and lack of existential meaning. In this final segment, I would like to argue that renewed social politicisation and active political engagement to communal matters through a radical democratic reform (such as the

revocable vote discussed in Chapter 2) would be an essential step towards addressing the existential predicament.

It should be clarified here that the political existential project that I propose targets only in easing the existential predicament and not resolving it. The human conditions are such that the existential absurdity cannot be resolved fully, unless humans reach higher levels of consciousness and knowledge that will provide more comprehensive answers about existence. Even when this happens, the inevitability of the end of being coming through death will always remain a major source of existential unease and anguish. Therefore, the question for existentialists is how to address and mitigate this unease, rather than resolve it, which currently seems an almost impossible task.

Paraphrasing Chapter 1: “The ancient Athenian *autonomy* was supported by the notion that participating in political decisions was a noble and righteous act that allowed man to be actively involved in the society and to develop communitarian traits. One could argue that this view was inherently part of the ancient Athenian imaginary. Interestingly, the English word idiot stems etymologically from the Greek *idiotis*, which means a private person, i.e. a person withdrawn from politics. Nevertheless, one withdrawn from politics was not welcome in the Athenian society, as Athenians looked down on *idiotes* (pl. *idiotis*), citizens who were not actively engaged in the political life of the city-state.¹ Pericles, one of the most prominent politicians and generals of the ancient Athens city-state, said once during a funeral that one with no interest in politics, who minds his own business, has no business in Athens at all, a statement that reflects

¹ Simon Goldhill, *Love, Sex & Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

the contempt of the time towards idiots. (...) The aim of future societies according to Castoriadis should be to transcend both ancient Athenian democracy and modern representative democracy and to constitute a truly universal and autonomous contemporary direct democracy. The latter can only be achieved, if we destroy the excessive importance of material pleasure and economic growth, while striving to establish a new morality, strictly linked with the mortal nature of humans. On the latter, Castoriadis explains that unlike modern times, human mortality was a major element of Athenian life and institutions, a constant reminder that citizens are heading day by day towards death. Instead, modern societies ignore death profoundly, which is the direct outcome of religious influences, facilitating the idea of an after-life. The illusion of immortality, or simply death ignorance, is a malady of contemporary societies that lead to a futile everyday struggle towards consumerism and in turn towards endless economic growth, which supports the domination of sterile and individualistic rationality across institutions.”

Labour exploitation and consumerism in modern societies indeed constitute sources of alienation, which complement the effects of the primary sources of existential anguish, i.e. death and the absurdity of life overall. The thinker that combines politics and death in the most constructive way is Hannah Arendt, who clearly influenced by her mentor Martin Heidegger and phenomenology moved on to indulge into the analysis of the *Human Condition (Vita Activa)*². In my view, Arendt is the most significant political existentialist theorist, even though she is rarely referred in this way in literature by fellow academics. With the term *Vita Activa*, Arendt distinguishes three basic

² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* ([Chicago]: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

activities of human existence; Labour, Work and Action. Labour regards the biological operation of the human body, whose human condition is life. Work on the other hand regards all unnatural processes, which provide the “artificial” world of things. The human condition of work is worldliness. Finally, the third activity is Action, and regards social interaction. It is the only activity that is solely conducted between humans without the intervention of matter and its human condition is plurality. Even though all three activities are connected with politics in some way, plurality is specifically the condition of all political life.³ Action is the only condition which takes place exclusively within society, as Labour and Work can in certain conditions take place outside a society.

Arendt (like Marcuse) criticizes modern capitalist and communist societies for focusing too much on Work and neglecting Action, which as a process depoliticizes societies, leading to a vain consumerism. Humans are privileged through Work and Action to create beyond the limits of their own life, thus achieving a form of “immortality”. However, this need for creation to achieve immortality is not expressed at its full potential, as in many cases humans seek immortality in vain or illusory activities, such as religion, which in almost all cases promises a kind of an after-life. In other words, religion allows humans to neglect the terminality of life, which comes with physical death and in turn the latter allows the emergence of various forms of vain actions. Arendt (like Castoriadis) admires the ancient Athenian society for comprehending deeply and incorporating to its imaginary the concepts of human mortality. The Greek world was built on the knowledge that there is no escape from this

³ Ibid., 7.

world and the humans are mortal, according to Castoriadis. *The gnosis (and not the fear) of death became the drive for life for ancient Greeks.*⁴ Religion and any theory or philosophy promising an after-life or a next life, alienates the drive of humans to achieve “immortality” through their in-life Action (the actions of the sole life that they can comprehend or perceive). Believing in an after-life can make the human passive about his or her existence, awaiting the next existential stage, or acting upon the expectation of another life, instead of acting with authenticity upon the given (and potentially the only) life.

The public space cannot be constructed only for one generation and to be formed only for the living, it must be structured in a way to exceed the limits of one’s life. Without this condition, no politics or common space formation is feasible, Arendt says. The public realm is the space we enter with birth and that we leave with death. For many centuries (but not anymore) humans have been entering the public realm with the aim of achieving something that would exceed their lifespan, according to Hannah Arendt. The tragedy of slaves was constituted not only in the fact of losing their freedom, but also in the fact that they were constrained from making an impact. However, humans have been alienated in modern times and have lost this genuine wish to achieve metaphysical “immortality” through in-life actions.⁵ As previously argued, consumerism, the one-dimensional aspects of modern societies and religion are some of the primary alienating sources that led humans to ignore the importance of mortality, metaphysical immortality and terminality of death.

⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Ancient Greek Democracy And Its Importance For Us Today - Η Αρχαία Ελληνική Δημοκρατία Και Η Σημασία Της Για Μας Σήμερα* (Athens: Ύψιλον, 1999), 24.

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* ([Chicago]: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

Today, humans (like ancient Athenians) need to get “inspired” by the certainty of the coming death and direct their creative powers into their current lives. They should not get either intimidated by death or ignore it. We cannot be just aware of the prospect of death, but we also need to be conscious of its imminence. In modern societies, we tend to displace death in some distant future, almost acting as if it will not happen. Despite being aware of death, we are not reflecting actively on death. Understanding the imminence of death would create stronger need to achieve “immortality” through in-life action. The latter can be best achieved en masse, yet in an authentic way, through engaging in the political space; i.e. trying to achieve metaphysical immortality by impacting directly on the collective. However, modern democracy, despite indeed constituting an improvement over earlier authoritarian political systems, still alienates voters by excluding them from the political-decision making process, while casting a broad-feeling of inability to influence the society, due to the weaknesses of periodical voting, as those have been discussed earlier in this dissertation. The fragility of democracy to elitism alienates voters coming from low social strata and either leads them to depoliticization or to the far-right wing, as recent examples from several European countries have shown. Camus was well-aware of the link between politics and the existential predicament and was one of the most prominent existentialists to take a clearly political stance on existence. “I rebel, therefore we exist”, he contends in his essay cornerstone *The Rebel*, arguing that rebellion (revolution) and collective solidarity is the optimal approach to the absurdity of existence. A rebel is one who rises against his fate, injustice and the whole existence. The rebel was one who has been subordinate for a whole a life, but one day suddenly he or she chooses to say no to yet

another command, under a strong feeling of justice. Only the need to restore justice (or what one feels is just) can support a successful rebellion. In every rebellion, there is a perfect harmonization between the subject and part of the self.

The rebel finds something that he can relate to or in other words something that he believes in, which eventually leads to the extension of the self. And really this is the key element of every social act. The humans' need to extend themselves, which eventually targets social recognition. The dread of death can be mitigated by the in-life and posthumous fame. The ancient Greeks were saying, "Money was hated by many, but fame by none!". This is why humans create; they create art, sciences, they make families, they participate in the private life, they become entrepreneurs, they try achieve and secure power. The final aim of the human subjects, even this takes place subconsciously, is recognition, which in turn leads to a feeling of "immortality". In other words, *the final goal of every human action, is immortality!* If we comprehend this simple, yet crucial thought of the subject and transfer it to the collective, we might be able to address the existentialist predicament en masse.

Humans strive to create diachronic ideas or pragmatic concepts, because those exceed the limited lifespan of life. In a way, the creation of an intertemporal concept pleases the subject because it achieves recognition and posthumous fame. Behind every constructive act is humans' need to achieve a form of social recognition, by making a public impact. If that impact is diachronic, even better. Making a family serves exactly the same purpose. Offsprings allow parents to extend themselves through passing by their genes and values, while they address partially the need of theoretical immortality as the natural path dictates that offsprings will live longer than the parents. The success

of social media is yet another example of the need to extend the self. Humans feel the need to achieve acknowledgement by publishing thoughts, views or experiences on the internet. The latter was also confirmed by a new Harvard study, which showed evidence that disclosing personal information in social media activates the same part of the brain that is associated with pleasure.⁶ In other words, social media could be as pleasing as eating food or sexual intercourse.

Let us reflect now on political institutions exclusively. If the subject was actively involved in the making of laws and justice, it would partially please the need for making an impact on society, while contributing to a diachronic concept, that of an institution. However, modern representative democracy (liberal democracy) is still exclusive enough (as discussed in Chapter 1) and does not allow the masses to feel involved in the process of social making! Political participation cannot be a complete resolution of existential predicament, by addressing fear of death and a need to achieve immortality and recognition, but it can almost surely contribute in mitigating the existential anguish by generating a feeling of communal involvement, contribution to the other and contribution to the diachronic endeavour of creating new institutions within society, institutions that would potentially last longer than one's life. However, modern democracy causes depoliticization, impersonalisation and an expanding trend of consumerism and globalization, especially after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the socialist antithesis. That said, the revocable vote reform, as discussed in Chapter 2 and any such reform that would lead to a renewed wave of democratization

⁶ D. I. Tamir and J. P. Mitchell, "Disclosing Information About The Self Is Intrinsically Rewarding", *Proceedings Of The National Academy Of Sciences* 109, no. 21 (2012): 8038-8043, doi:10.1073/pnas.1202129109.

and the repoliticization of societies is bound to be not only a democratic reform but also an existential reform, as it would place again the *politis* (citizen) at the center of the *polis* and of its institutions. Modern democracy is elitist, aristocratic and hence it is unjust and alienating. People should reclaim the power to decide for themselves, they should be granted the right to behave as legislators and rise to the task of becoming *universal legislators*, as Sartre suggested.

So, should citizens acquire special or general knowledge (in order to be eligible to participate in democracy), Castoriadis was once asked and he answered: *The specialists should be at the service of citizens not at the service of politicians. Citizens can only learn to rule, via ruling...* Such a simple thought by Castoriadis, yet so essential. If we do not allow people to rule, how can one learn to become a responsible legislator. It is easy to blame the masses of being unintelligent or uncappable of making wise decisions, when the whole democratic system in the west is dominated by propaganda, elitism and lobbying, coupled with a new-wave life of consumerism, which aims to disorient the people, instead of engaging them in political processes. There is only one condition for the political emancipation of the people and that is education, actual education and political education. The first should take place through schooling and the second through more active participation in political processes, a new form of political existentialism. The role of the intellectuals is essential in the struggle for democratisation (as discussed in Chapter 2), but it is also essential in the radical transformation of education to pave the way for political emancipation. The school should become a space of encouraging social and political involvement, instead of the current depoliticizing institutions. Schools should educate pupils in depth about

economic, social and political mechanisms. Castoriadis calls this a school of *social anatomy*, suggesting that the educational process should become a process of passion for both the educators and the educated. If there is no love in education, there can be no education, Castoriadis said. Intellectuals are yet again responsible for driving institutional change with regards to education, as well as with regards to propagating an active *en masse* political involvement, which would gradually lead to the repoliticization of societies. Political existentialism is an ambitious, dialectical, intergenerational project of assuming responsibility for ourselves and the others in an effort to address collectively the individual's existential predicament. The existential anguish is experienced at the individual level, but a potential remedy likely lies at the collective level, through active engagement in politics and the formation of institutions. *The extension of the self, recognition and eventually "immortality" passes through reassuming a role of daily political participation in common matters.*

Concluding remarks

“Everything has been figured out, except how to live.”
Jean-Paul Sartre

The content of this dissertation was conceived in 2012, when I was still conducting my Master’s thesis in political economy at the University of London. The motivation to conduct a study on democratisation emerged from the increasing signs of democratic expansion across the world after the end of the Cold War, which was however not coupled by an expected reduction of wealth disparities, as the gap between the elites and the poor continued to widen. Since contemporary representative democracy (and its dominant form in the West, *liberal democracy*) are majoritarian systems and since the “poor” (as defined in Chapter 1) constitute the majority, then one would expect such disparities to contract. The evident opposite trajectory however teased my academic appetite to indulge into the world of democratic political theory and philosophy.

After careful consideration, the dissertation was separated in three Chapters. The first Chapter regards a pragmatic critique on modern liberal democracy and on its injustices, along with a brief exposition of ancient Athenian democracy and of its paradigm. The latter remains a source of democratic inspiration to date. The chapter includes a brief history of democracy, along with presenting Castoriadis’s concept of institution and societal *autonomy* and his critique on representative democracy in comparison to the ancient Athenian democracy. By incorporating the political economy of Acemoglu and Robinson, it was argued that modern liberal democracy was the result of a slow strategic process, where the elites gave up their power monopoly (de jure

political power) and granted democratization to avoid social unrest. However, Western liberal democracy comes with mechanisms that allows the elites to hold disproportional de facto political power at the expense of the poor.

The main contribution of Chapter 1 regards locating the disproportionate power of the *elites* against the *poor* at the *temporary permanence of legislators*, which allows them to capitalize on their economic power and influence political decision through propaganda, lobbying and/or bribing. Legislators get elected on pre-election platforms that they are not accountable of fulfilling after election. This dissertation argues that *legislators' temporary permanence* constitutes the primary structural deficiency of democracy, which leaves it susceptible to corruption and elitism. The latter achieves to meet the main part of the goal of this dissertation, which was to identify the link between democratisation and elitism, prior to considering ideas for reformation in Chapter 2.

It is further argued in Chapter 1 that liberal democracy disintegrated in the 20th-21st centuries, especially after the end of the Cold War, where many former Communist nations rushed to embrace liberalism. The latter allowed the fast expansion of global marketization, which in turn reduced nation-state sovereignty. Integrating this argument in Acemoglu and Robinson's four-path theory of democratisation, I propose a *fifth path* of political development, one of a gradually disintegrating democracy over the course of the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century. The *fifth path* is a theoretical extension of the first path, as identified by Acemoglu and Robinson (case of Britain), but after aggregating the fall of Communism and the globalisation, which allowed the elites to transcend the barriers of nation-state sovereignty. The fifth path extension suggests that democracy was stronger in Western countries prior to the fall of

the Berlin Wall and disintegrated afterwards at the modern times of political and economic globalisation. To support the *fifth path* contribution, I utilised Bauman's theory of *interregnum* and globalisation, as well as Crouch's theory of *post-democracy*. The concluding remark in relation to the goal of the thesis is that liberal democracy indeed follows a globalising hegemonic trajectory with strong systemic influence by the elites.

Chapter 2 constitutes a continuation of Chapter 1 and builds towards the dissertation goal of uncovering and addressing the link between democratisation and elitism. Chapter 2 also includes the main academic contribution of this dissertation (and of Chapter 2), which is to introduce in academia for the first time *en masse revocable voting* within the framework of liberal democracy. It is argued that the revocable vote would serve as a remedy to *legislators' temporary permanence*. The latter allows the elites to influence political decision-making through illegitimate means, such as media propaganda, lobbying and bribing and in general by exerting their disproportionate economic force onto politics.

It was argued that we live in a world of a conservative liberal hegemony that is becoming gradually stronger through the expansion of liberal democracy and globalisation. The rise of this hegemony is in the hands of corporatocratic elites that hold disproportional de facto political power, due to their ability to influence liberal democratic institutions. In turn, the Left and the poor are still organising their struggle on the traditional socialist approach of prioritising their social requests with respects to wealth imbalances, targeting specific economic policy decisions and, to a great extent, neglecting that wealth imbalances are directly the result of political injustice. The

revocable vote is an idea that targets providing the poor and the intellectuals with the right theoretical tools to reorganize their struggle and combat social injustices at the root of the problem, which is the elitism of politics.

The revocable vote entails voter's ability to revoke or reassign his or her vote directly, when he or she feels misrepresented by the legislators. Revoking a vote should be taking place without the intervention of any indirect form of democratic institutions, such as a parliament or a senate. The revocable vote is a process envisioned to be incorporated within representative parliamentary democracy and transforming it into a more direct form of democracy without necessarily ousting the concept of representation. The poor and the Left need to prioritise reallocating their resources into combating the political power of the elites, as the social struggle for wealth redistribution is vain, without addressing the source of such imbalances, which is political elitism.

Chapter 2 also includes a thorough exposition of Gramsci's theory of *hegemony* and *war of position*, combined with Mouffe's work on agonistic pluralism and radical democracy. Combining the work of Gramsci and Mouffe achieved to provide in one academic document clearly and distinctly the work of the two theorists exclusively in relation to modern democracy. In turn, a substantial part of Chapter 2 is devoted to discuss the implementation of the revocable vote reform as a part of a new form of Gramscian *war of position* by the poor. The latter targets incorporating in this struggle part of the middle classes that favour democratisation, given that the earlier economic struggles of the poor have failed profoundly to unify broader parts of the society. That said, a secondary contribution of Chapter 2 regards the introduction of the idea that

future struggles against the elites should take place on the basis of broad political platforms to bear any hope of success. The revocable vote reform (or a similar direct democratic reform) is the platform though which I propose this *war of position* to take place.

Finally, Chapter 3 constitutes an extension to Chapter 2 by considering the implications of revocable voting on the self. Chapter 3 attempts an exploration of the self in relation to politics, death, modern-life alienation and democracy, while seeking a solution to the existential predicament through politics. The discussion of a radical democratic project, such as the revocable vote, would be pointless without considering the existential implications at the micro-level of the human subject. Chapter 3 attempts to argue that the realisation of the imminence of death, along with politicization can revert modern societies' consumerist trajectory. We know since ancient Athens that metaphysical immortality and recognition can be achieved at the public space. Therefore, a radical democratic reform (such as the revocable vote) would not only address inequality and injustice at the collective level, but would also ease the effects of the existential predicament, providing a more fertile ground to individuals to serve as universal legislators and strive for authenticity. Chapter 3 also serves as a distinctive academic source of merging literature on existentialism, death and alienation.

Principal Contributions

- 1) This dissertation argued that the link between the modern wave democratisation and elitism lies *at legislators' temporary permanence*. Legislators get elected on pre-election platforms, which they are not directly accountable of fulfilling after election. This structure allows the elites to capitalize on their economic power and influence political decision through propaganda, lobbying and/or bribing. Globalisation has also favoured the link between democracy and the elites after the end of the Cold War and the fall of Communism, which mitigated any viable opposing (i.e. counter-hegemonic) project to that of liberal democracy and liberal capitalism.
- 2) Building upon the Acemoglu and Robinson's four-path theory of political development, a *fifth path* of political development is proposed. The fifth path is one that leads from non-democracy to a stable democracy (like in the cases of the first and the second path), but then democracy disintegrates gradually, without however collapsing. In other words, in the suggested *fifth path* of political development, democracy survives, as the elites do not bear adequate incentives to mount a coup, but at the same time, *legislators' temporary permanence* and globalisation allow the elites to secure gradually rising de facto political influence within a country. It was further suggested that the fifth path is ideally represented by liberal democratic regimens, mainly Western nation-states that used to be democratic prior and after the fall of the Berlin Wall (e.g. UK, France, Italy etc.). The fifth path contribution suggests that democracy was

stronger in Western countries prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall and disintegrated afterwards at the modern times of political and economic globalisation.

- 3) The primary contribution of this thesis regards the introduction for the first time in academia of *en masse revocable voting* within the framework of liberal democracy. It is argued that the revocable vote would serve as a remedy to *legislators' temporary permanence*. The revocable vote means that a voter would be granted the opportunity to revoke or reassign his or her vote directly, when he or she feels misrepresented by the legislators. Revoking a vote should be taking place without the intervention of any indirect form of democratic institutions, such as a parliament or a senate. The revocable vote is a process envisioned to be incorporated within liberal democracy and transforming it into a more direct form of democracy without necessarily ousting the concept of representation.
- 4) Finally, this dissertation also attempts arguing that a transcendence to more direct forms of democracy would address the existential predicament at the individual level. A return to the political space for the human subject can revert the current trajectory of societies towards impersonalisation and consumerism. We know since ancient Athens that metaphysical immortality and recognition can be achieved at the public space. Therefore, a radical democratic transcendence (such as the one envisaged through revocable vote reform) would not only address inequality and injustice at the collective level, but would also ease the effects of the existential predicament, providing more fertile ground for

individuals to “achieve immortality”, by serving as universal legislators and striving for authenticity.

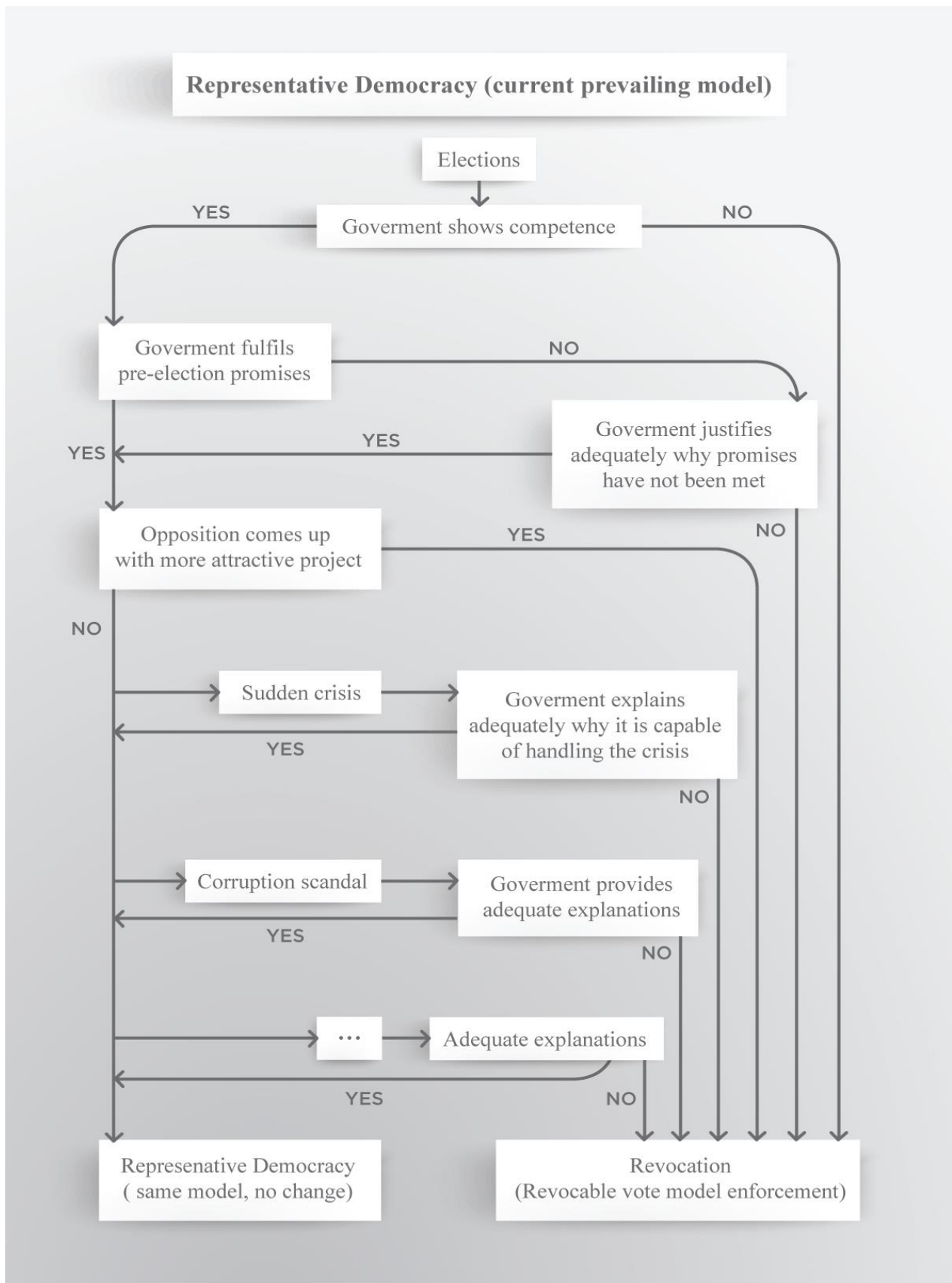
Appendix: Some more clarity on the revocable vote

It should be noted yet again that the *en masse revocable voting* model, as analysed in Chapter 2, constitutes indeed a radical reform, but still only an addition to the currently prevailing liberal representative democratic model. That said, and as shown in flowchart A.1, if voters do not exercise their revocable voting right, we would find ourselves back at the known representative democratic model, without any change. In other words, the revocable vote aims to improve the representative democracy and correct its structural deficiencies, such as *legislators' temporary permanence* and elitism, but does not distort the foundations of representative democracy. Instead, it adds one additional layer of governmental control on top of the parliament. It should also be clarified here, that the parliament sustains its full functionality and would also be able to withdraw its support to the government under the revocable vote model, same as in the currently prevailing model. The revocable vote is an additional control mechanism that franchises government control from the parliament to the people, in case legislators are not competent or honest enough to conduct their tasks. However, legislators do sustain the *same authority*, as members of the parliament *but with less power*. This means that their expertise is still being utilised, but not without the control of the people. Legislators might indeed be constituting a superior skilled technocracy compared to the median voter (though not always), but under the proposed revocable vote democratic model, they need to provide adequate explanations to the people (see flowchart A.1) and justify their actions comprehensively in order to avoid revocation and maintain the right of exercising their expertise. *Legislators are civil servants, not rulers!*

Let us now delve into a specific example of revocable vote democracy. For reasons of simplification assume that elections take place under a simple proportional voting system. This means that a party or ruling coalition needs 51% of the vote to form a government, and if for example it gets elected on 55% rate, this translates to 55% of the voters and 55% of the parliament seats. Let us take the latter as our case scenario. One party or ruling coalition come to power with 55% of the vote and consequently forms a government that is ratified by the parliament, where it controls 55% of the delegates. In the revocable vote model, this government would have to sustain at least 51% of the vote in order to avoid revocation and consequently snap elections, where a new government would be elected. We should note here that each voter in revocable vote democracy would be allowed to revoke his or her vote and reassign to another party or leave it blank. However, this would not stand only for the voters who backed the government, but also for opposition voters, who could revoke their vote from opposition parties and reassign it to ruling parties, if they deem that the government's policy trajectory is favourable. As a result, assuming the 55% rate as a starting point after elections, this would mean that if 5% of government voters revoked and reassigned their votes, if 1% of opposition party voters revoked and reassigned their votes to the government, then it would still sustain the 51% threshold, which would be necessary to remain in office. In other words, revocation and reassignment voting flows are free through an electronic dynamic democratic platform and the government maintains power as long as it remains above the 51% threshold. The moment a government's appeal in the electronic platform drops below 51% at any point of its tenure, the government is immediately dissolved and the country heads to snap elections to elect a

new government. Following the explained mathematical rule, a series of revocation examples are presented in flowchart A.1 below for more clarity.

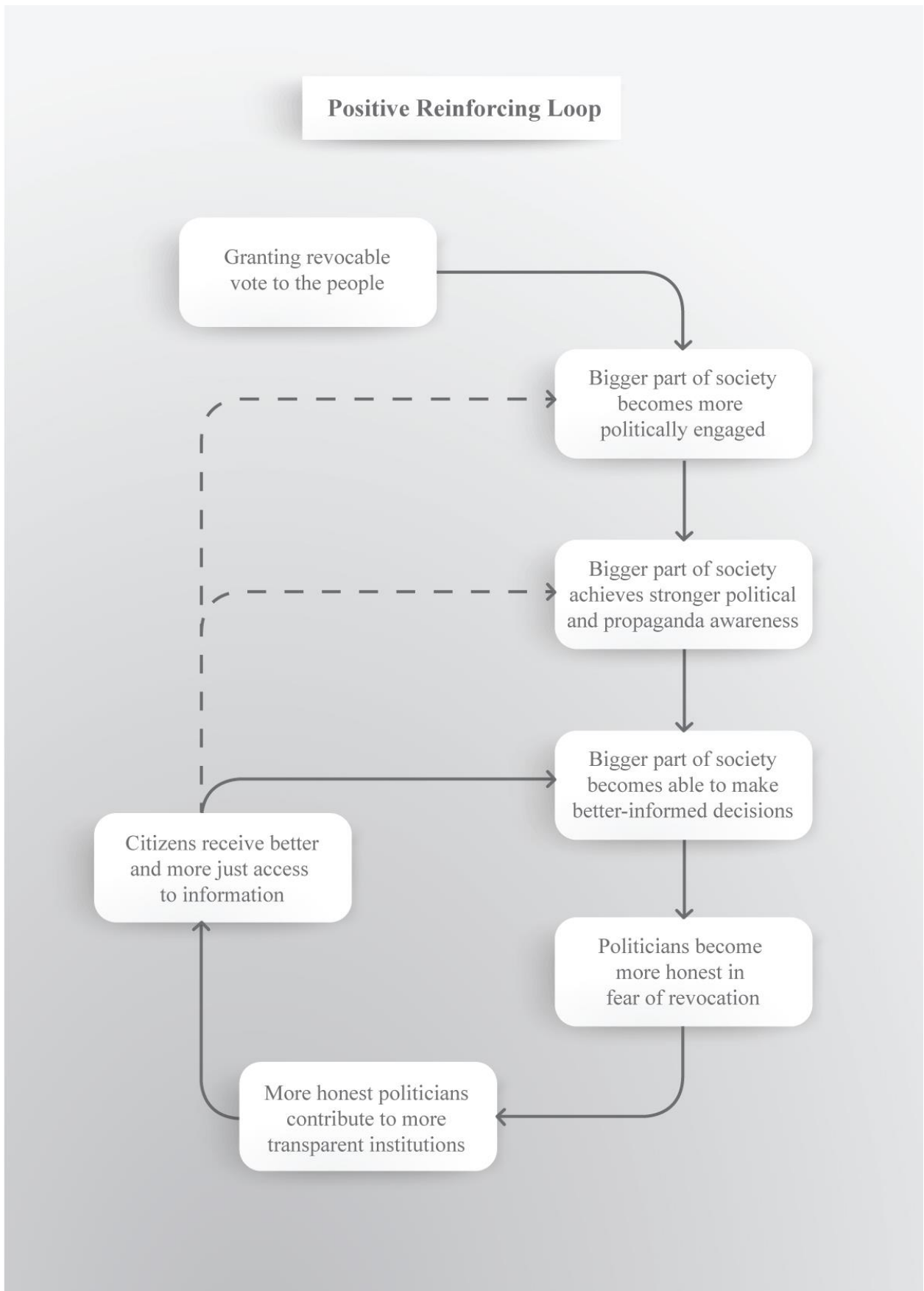
Flowchart A.1



Granting the revocable to the people is not only a straightforward reform to address *legislators' temporary permanence* and elitism, as argued earlier in this thesis, but it is also a reform that would mobilise a *positive reinforcing loop* within societies, as presented in flowchart A.2. As already discussed, in the appendix voters are not obliged to utilise their revocable voting right, but at least some will do. In search of making the right political decision (to revoke or not), voters will end up becoming more actively politically engaged (reading bills, following politicians actions), by abandoning partially the passive concession that modern voters grant to the government after elections in modern liberal democracy. This would be a process of political emancipation that is also present in referendum democratic models, such as in the case of the Swiss paradigm (Chapter 1.7). Political emancipation would in turn lead to great political and propaganda awareness, which is extremely important, as in the case of a revocable voting democracy, increasing the levels of illegitimate political activities (bribing, propaganda, lobbying) would be an expected response by the elites. However, as already argued in Chapter 2.5, in an *en masse revocable voting* democracy sustaining such high levels of bribing, propaganda and lobbying would be very costly for the elites. As a result, part of the politicians would become more honest (e.g. abide with pre-election promises, conduct more realistic and honest pre-election campaigns) in fear of revocation. The latter can only lead to more transparent institutions and consequently to more better and more just access to information related to political decision for the voters. The latter reenergizes a loop of better-informed voters, which would (with revocable voting being in place) incentivise politicians to be more transparent and honest, otherwise they would simply not remain in power, or they would lead their

countries to a chaotic loop of swing voting and multiple elections. The latter, as discussed in Chapter 2.5, is a potential scenario for the early stages of revocable voting implementation, but the positive reinforcing loop should eventually prevail, due to the high costs for the elites and voters' discontent about periods of prolonged destabilisation. As a result, the system would eventually reach an equilibrium of gradually longer periods between elections, similar to currently prevailing model of representative democracy. The system dynamics are also subject to the initial overall educational level of a society, where revocable voting would be implemented. However, the overall positive reinforcing benefits of more active political engagement and higher political awareness should present themselves in almost all cases.

Flowchart A.2



Technical Data

Item	Number
Pages of the dissertation (bibliography included)	202
Words	56,067
Characters (no spaces)	306,599
Characters (with spaces)	362,510
Number of pages according to BDS (1,800 per page)	201
Introduction	4
Chapters:	
Pre-chapter: (Theoretical Umbrella)	13
First	62
Second	47
Third	50
Apendix	7
Conclusion	7
Bibliography number of pages	4
Font : Times New Roman	12 пункта
Line spacing of the dissertation	25 пункта
Numbers of bibliography items	100

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