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LESSONS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The Indigenous experience with Democracy from Below in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

This work proposes to share the experience of the indigenous peoples in Mexico and their progress in building a concrete democracy from below. Democracy from below is an active and participatory governing system in which democracy, meaning popular power, is exercised in every branch of life as an empowering mechanism in itself. The lessons from the Global South proposes changes to the educational system and incentive pluralism in the media outlets by focusing on community media. Besides, it entails a strong and effective accountability mechanism and requires emphasis on the local level in order to develop another project of democracy which will help the efforts of increasing the engagement of civil society in political matters and in the public sphere.

To Gustavo Esteva Figueiroa who
taught me that another world is
possible and to Sylvia Knittel who
rethought it with me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Acknowledgments

Introduction, 1

1. **The roots: Analysing the supportive basis of the problem, 3**

2. **The stem: Analysing the structures of the problem, 19**

Juntas de Buen Gobierno and the Caracoles, 27

Congreso Nacional Indígena and the Indigenous Governing Council, 28

Democracy from Below, 31

3. **Flourishing the concept, 38**

The local level, 40

Media and Education, 44

The delegates or Spokesperson, 47

Accountability and “Recall”, 49

Conclusion, 53

Bibliography, 55

INTRODUCTION

Another world is possible. Every day worldwide news report the rising of authoritarianism, xenophobia, racism, states openly disrespecting human rights and people endangered for speaking up. A rising backlash against human rights leaves us thinking whether the human rights era has come to an end. ‘No!’ Is the first answer that comes to mind. However, in order to solve the disrepute that human rights are facing, changes are required. George Ulrich suggests that human rights is an unfinished project, a project in constant change aiming to build solutions to the growing discredit faced by the human rights system. If human rights is a project, so is democracy.

It is only through democracy that a strong human rights system can be developed. However, it seems that the contemporary democratic system is spreading poverty, a class system and increasingly apathy for the political system. How can human rights survive in such conditions? Democracy and human rights are both constantly changing and if one is struggling then it is time for a change. Democracy can only thrive if people have the power to speak up and participate in the decision-making process, meaning that the change must come from below.

The purpose of this work is to promote a shared experience of democracy in which everyone can benefit from. Sharing the experience of the indigenous peoples and their progress in building a concrete democracy from below will help the efforts of increasing the engagement of civil society in political matters and in the public sphere. The lessons from the Global South offer a way of thinking that praises the community instead of the individual, promoting a collaborative and collective approach that can support the contemporary democratic system to overcome current struggles.

Democracy from below comes from insurgency. It comes from an individual attitude towards our daily life that not only shapes our surroundings but also promotes significant changes in the political sphere. Therefore, democracy from below encourages people to

actively demand for their rights and build another world order instead of increasing the apathy for the political system.

The experience which this work is based on was enriching. I was able to participate in the Indigenous National Congress held in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, where the first indigenous woman was chosen to run for presidency of the country. The city of San Cristobal de las Casas shares a magical atmosphere and – at the same time - a resistance spirit. That was where the indigenous uprising took place in 1994. Besides, the historical moment that happened in May 2017 gave everyone a feeling of hope that another world is possible, a world where many worlds fit.

This work was only possible thanks to the EZLN and the indigenous peoples in Mexico (both of which have ‘insurgency’ as their last name) and therefore I paid a tribute to the Mother Earth in their homage, naming each chapter after the three main parts of a tree, as one of the main representation of nature. The first chapter analyses the *supportive basis* of the indigenous experience in Mexico providing the means to develop the *structure* of the proposal and finally *flourishing* the concept of democracy from below based on the indigenous experience.

The proposal built in this work requires changes to the educational system and incentive pluralism in the media outlets by focusing on community media. Besides, it entails a strong and effective accountability mechanism and requires emphasis on the local level in order to develop another project of democracy. In such project, the tone is given by a strong and active civil society participation that shapes the route for an increasingly more democratic society, in which the power comes from below.

CHAPTER ONE

The roots: Analysing the supportive basis of the problem

It might be true that the primary goal of colonization was not to rule other peoples¹, however driven by European concepts of land “ownership” developed by John Locke whereby the land is unowned if no act of true appropriation is performed, colonization were the fitly response to the annexation objectives inherent to the Empire mentality. The motivation to settle in “unowned” land and impose the imperial realm led the colonizers to foist an alien notion of property and law to native people that triggered the use of force and extermination of the latter. The imposition of a foreign mentality embedded of superiority ideals is also a mark of the eagerness to annex new conquests, in the sense that the annexation is not singularly related to ownership of a greater amount of land, but to the propagation of culture, religion and the rule of the Crown.

The colonization rule was a clash of different cultures and concepts, in which the colonizers believed themselves to be superior and single owners of the concepts of ‘civilization’ and ‘modernity’, as well, for being the most belligerent power, they were able to impose its rule over the colonized, or native peoples, who were momentarily forced to have their voice hushed but kept the resistance within. Accordingly, the debate between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda summarizes the misconception that based the approach towards indigenous peoples. Sepúlveda believed that the “barbaric traditions” of indigenous peoples, namely cannibalism, idolatry, among others supported his argument of waging war over indigenous peoples, while Las Casas

¹ “Curiously though, the notion that colonial rule was not really about colonial rule but something else was a persistent theme in the rhetoric of colonial rule itself.” (Chatterjee, P., *The Nation and its fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial histories*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 199, p. 14)

understood that such practices were against the “human nature”, however he believed that were not through slavery or violence the way to fight indigenous traditions, but through teaching the values of Christianity². Based on the debate it is interesting to notice the misconception which drove the colonization, meaning that even the ones who waived the flag of a peaceful treatment, also waived the flag of *effacement* of local cultures through Catholicism.

Having this said, the colonization logic was based on the suppression – under force – of everything that differs from the European mentality, promoting a standardization of cultures, laws, political system, religions and way of living that were designed to fit a certain type of culture, but not all of them indistinctly. The colonization imposed a culture and a power structure that were never their own, homogenising all the nations and imposing the political entity that characterizes the state, however a nation state is characterized by the identification of the peoples with the cultural, political and ethnic features of the country (Clendinnen, 1987). How can everyone share the feeling of identification if they are not represented? How can everyone share the feeling of belonging to a certain nation or state if it is not plural or diverse enough to embrace all the diversities that compose a country? How to demand for representation in the public sphere if one does not have a voice? Most importantly, how can a democracy survive in such conditions?

The formation of a nation state — as a 19th century European concept — presupposes that everyone sharing the geographical space demarcated by national frontiers shares the same cultural, ethnic, religious and political background and all other cultures are considered pre-modern and worthy of forgetfulness for being outside the framework established

² “The two sides based their arguments on the Bible, the Church Fathers, and Spanish medieval as well as Renaissance thought and law. For his part, Ginés de Sepúlveda put forward four propositions in favor of the just war against the Native Americans: first, the Indians were barbarians; second, they committed crimes against natural law; third, the Indians oppressed and killed the innocent among themselves; and fourth, they were infidels who needed to be instructed in the Christian faith. Las Casas, in contrast, set out to expand and clarify each one of these points. In the process, he came to advocate the essential unity of humankind; that is, the Indians, though at a different and backward stage of human development than the Europeans, were no less rational and adept to peacefully receive the Christian faith than the peoples of the Old World. Also, Las Casas came to conclude that Spain’s sole role in the New World was spiritual rather than economic or political.” (Hernandez, B., ‘The Las Casas-Sepúlveda Controversy: 1550-1551’, Ex Post Facto, San Francisco State University, 2015, pp. 95–105)

alone by the political elites. In order to create a national identity, a massification is necessary and all of which distances from the so-called “common identity” is an object of a forced cultural assimilation³. Opposing the nation state “common identity” concept, the main goal of a true democracy is to embrace all cultural, religious, political and ethnic groups, considering that the society is diverse and as such it must integrate all different groups in a collaborative form of state. However, both concepts are Eurocentric and perfectly designed to fit *European* societies, meaning that even long after the independence from European Crowns, the people who disposed of their own land cannot freely live their culture with self-determination and autonomy.

Following the Westphalian Treaties that intended to restore peace around Europe, the self-determination basis was shaped and states were from now on sovereign and able to freely pursue its own political status without interference, except the colonies. In light of this, the urgency to unify and build a national common identity in order to maintain the state power promoted a suppression of “non-national” identities. Accordingly, in order to achieve an agreement, the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*⁴, literally translated to “whose realm, his religion” — meaning that the religion of the ruler must be the religion of the ruled — was one of the main principles of the accord as well as being a basis for the annihilation of different religions and identities. The colonies, in this sense,

³ “Desde otra óptica, aunque no muy alejada de este análisis, la idea de Estado-nación sería también parte de un proceso de dominación. El proceso de integración del Estado-nacional se produciría por la dominación de una etnia mayoritaria hacia otra u otras minoritarias (Smith, 1981, 1997). En este caso la centralización respondería más bien a criterios raciales y culturales que otorgan supuestos derechos de superioridad de un sector de la sociedad sobre otro concebido como inferior. Lo claro es que en el caso de América Latina, desde las primeras décadas del siglo XIX, la mayoría de las antiguas colonias hispanas se dieron a la tarea de construir un Estado-nación que consideró sólo a una parte de los pueblos y “naciones” existentes en su seno. Bajo el influjo liberal en varios países se intentó el reconocimiento de los indígenas como ciudadanos, pero ello más que una ventaja para los indígenas implicaba su anulación o negación como tales. De esta manera, los proyectos liberales de construcción de nación prescindieron de los pueblos indígenas y en la mayoría se creó la idea de que la nueva nación era “racialmente homogénea”, por lo general blanca o mestiza. Este proceso fue más dramático en aquellos países donde la mayor parte de la población pertenecía a uno o más pueblos indígenas (v.g. Bolivia, Perú, Guatemala y México) pero donde las élites (blancas) impusieron o actualizaron esquemas políticos excluyentes de las grandes mayorías y donde a los indígenas o afrodescendientes sólo se les dejó permitir acceder a una “integración simbólica” a la nación (Bello & Rangel, 2000)” (Bello, M., ‘Hegemonía, historia y pueblos indígenas en la formación del Estado-nación chileno’, Revista de Educación Aula Abierta, n. 131, año 10 (Parte 1) and n.132, año 10 (Parte 2), Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2012 pp. 5)

⁴ Derived from the Peace of Augsburg (1555) that ended the religion struggle, allowing the Crowns to choose between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism as the official religion of the States.

maintained its subordination and dependence whilst also having to assimilate the “common identity” of its colonizers and consequently forgetting their own.

After the independence of colonies a government was established and it was composed by political elites, continuing to follow European guidelines and concepts — especially the nation state notion — since the ones ruling the new independent countries maintained tight connections and ascendancy with the old continent. Therefore, can one affirm former colonies truly have the right of self-determination? According to Pick (2011), “the concepts of sovereignty and legitimacy are necessary to a nation state because, by its nature, the primary loyalty of a population is to its nation. [...] Since loyalty is to the nation as a cultural abstraction, the Government must be accepted by the population as the proper source of the nation’s authority”. However, how can the population (a group of people living in the same geographical area) be loyal to a system they do not recognize as legitimate or that they do not identify with? The heritage of colonialism promoted the homogenisation of whole continents, wherein the importation of a single identity, religion, political system and way of living perpetuated not only eternal cultural colonies but also a population lost in their sense of self-identification.

As generalizing as it may sound, the history of colonization in Latin America share almost the same characteristics: a history of invasion, denial, ethnocide, ‘modernity’ and imposition of a foreign ideal. It also shares a history of resistance and fight against the perpetuation of injustice. The shared history built a continent with similar characteristics of power struggles and societal formation. Therefore, although Mexican indigenous peoples were chosen to be analysed, this analysis could as well regard any other Latin American country or people that share similar history of resistance and a mentality of collectiveness. However the characteristics might find some similarities, the history of indigenous peoples in Mexico is somehow unique in the way they organize themselves, always fought against oppression and oppressors and promoted social justice not only to indigenous peoples, but also to non-indigenous peoples.

As a settlement colony, Mexico societal formation was composed by Spaniards sent by Spain to rule the colony who were the only ones able to hold high-level jobs in the government; Creoles, descendants of Spaniards who were born in Mexico and had very

low influence in the government despite usually being landowners; Mestizos, descendants from both Spaniards and Indigenous people, who were victims of perverted ideals of superiority of a pure race and thus composed the lower stratum of the society. At the very lower level of societal stratification, indigenous peoples were the poorest among them all and like the Mestizos were forced to work exhaustively based on the superiority of the pure race. (Clendinnen, 1987)

Based on the race-based societal formation, indigenous people were always marginalized, non-represented and nourished a deep sense of not belonging to their own land, which continued even after the country's independence that brought once again the ideal of the European supremacy to rule the Nation. The independence process experienced by colonies was itself a mirror of the denial of political participation to indigenous people. The power struggles were uprising from the higher economic and political stratum of the society who was keen to enjoy autonomy from the Crown but adherents to the existing model of social stratification.

The caste system established after the Mexican independence put the Creoles⁵ on the top of the social pyramid, eliminating the rhetoric of equality between the population. It was in this scenario that the non-indigenous elite (ladinos) were able to mislead indigenous and peasants of the Yucatan Peninsula in what was later designated as the Caste War. In 1847, Mexico and United States went to war over the area of Texas and the Yucatan Peninsula - also populated by Spanish descendants and adherents to the caste system — declared independence from Mexico. The independence of Yucatan was earned under false promises made by the ladinos, recruiting Mayan peoples and alleging that a land reform and abolition of multiple taxes were going to be promoted in exchange for their participation in the Yucatan independence war against Mexico. However, after the independence, the ladinos refused to fulfil the agreement leading the Mayan troops to revolt. (Weinberg, 2000, p. 25) The Caste War of Yucatan almost succeeded to regain the region from colonial power but it was outmatched by the elites and as a means of punishment Mayans were enslaved and forcibly reallocated.

⁵ The Creoles were named Ladinos after the independence.

The resistance against colonial rule often took the form of violent movements. However, indigenous peoples also fought against oppression through legal systems by being able to pass a law which ‘declared respect for the territorial patrimony of indigenous peoples’ (Warman, 1976, p. 29). Nonetheless, the legislation never achieved its effectivity, becoming mainly a decorative symbol to maintain indigenous peoples under colonial yoke and far from resistance which could also be a rehearsal for the framing of the Mexican State and its relation to the indigenous peoples. The independence of Mexico itself was a power struggle between local elites and the Spanish Crown, who usurping Father Miguel Hidalgo and Father José María Morelos’ struggle for social justice for peasants and indigenous peoples⁶ (Benjamin, 1996, p. 11), perverting its dynamics and crushing its ideal for, ultimately, being appropriated by local elites who were seeking to perpetuate its own advantages and wealth against the new liberal Spanish constitution. (Khasnabish, 1976, p. 26)

The next chapter of the indigenous struggles is more recent and regards the dictatorship of the General Porfírio Díaz and his search for ‘modernization’. This meant that his 35-year rule would aim at the industrialization and “europeanization” of Mexico at the expense of the peasantry and workers. Díaz’s project was a racial-based ideology in the sense that the modernization goal glimpsed by him was only possible through the effacement of indigenous culture and the ‘furtherance of white control, national or international’ (Wolf, 1969, p. 14). In his hands, the country and especially indigenous peoples, peasantry, workers and minorities would live a nightmare, being relentlessly silenced and watching the ideal of social justice fade away. (Khasnabish, 1976, p. 29)

Almost 500 years of history summarized in a few lines might confuse the reader, however imagine living inside this whirlwind and still not sharing the feeling of belonging to your

⁶ “The element of social justice was particularly evident in the leadership of the insurrection by Morelos. On the 17 November 1810 Morelos proclaimed an end to discrimination and institutionalized racism. Furthermore, Morelos declared an end to slavery and to Indian tribute as well as demanding the return of lands that had been stolen from Indigenous peoples. However, as Eric Wolf notes, ‘as soon as it became evident that the revolt was also a war of the poor against entrenched privilege, the army, the Church, and the great landowners came to the support of the Spanish Crown and crushed the rebellion. Independence would ultimately be won for Mexico from Spain in 1812 by elites seeking to protect their own advantages and wealth in the face of a liberalizing Spanish constitution’ (Khasnabish, A., *Zapatismo beyond borders: New Imaginations of Political Possibility*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1976)

own land? It was in this scenario that movements demanding for political participation of minorities were growing, some violently others peacefully, but all demanding for autonomy and self-determination.

In Mexico, on the first day of 1994, as a response to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)⁷ entry into force, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) led an uprising in the southern state of Chiapas. The uprising was composed mainly by indigenous people and peasants who demanded for land, food, health, home, education, work and most significantly, justice, freedom and democracy for both indigenous people and Mexicans. As an attempt from indigenous people's to demand equality and social justice, the uprising also reflected the phenomenon of effective political participation.

One of the many interesting aspects of the uprising was the engagement of indigenous women who actively participated by questioning their role in the “traditional” society and demanding for equality, reproductive rights, action against domestic violence and political participation in a way that “customs and traditions be respected if and when they do not violate women’s rights” (Grupo de Trabajo 4 1995, p. 22). Another aspect was the construction of the idea of an autonomous region wherein indigenous people could exercise their right of self-determination, being represented in the pluralistic and only concept of democracy.

The uprising of indigenous people in Mexico overturns several pre-conceived concepts. Namely, the on-going debate on universalism and relativism of human rights, wherein in order to perceive human rights as a universal, indivisible collection of rights inherent of all human beings, some cultural practices, especially of indigenous people, are rejected.

⁷ The NAFTA is an agreement between Canada, United States and Mexico to create a trade bloc in North America. The impacts on human rights were analysed ten year after the entry into force by the International Federation of Human Rights (IFHR), finding out that the trade agreement destroyed the agriculture industry, driving Mexican families to urban areas where they live in extreme poverty, as well women and children hired by transnational companies work in exhaustive situation receiving extremely low wages. Violations of human rights were found as well regarding the right of association, in the sense that the Unions are influenced by politicians in order to attract new investments benefiting only the high stratum of the society. (International Federation of Human Rights. *Report: International fact-finding mission. Mexico: The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA): Effects on Human Rights.* N. 448/2, April 2006, www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/Mexique448-ang2006.pdf (accessed 02 May 2017)

For instance, the discriminatory indigenous customs against women was one of these practices, although in Mexico the political movements for effective participation reflected the possibility of joining both indigenous culture and human rights, bringing together equal rights to men and women.

The relativist theory believes that human rights are singularly based on western values. It states that human rights idealization was a product of fifty-six countries, mostly colonial powers, which gathered to pursue an universal ideal of human dignity, social justice and peace whilst most of them maintained colonies overseas and worked as means to homogenise ‘diverse cultures’ (Ulrich, 2001, p. 195). However, the universalism of human rights and the indigenous uprising in Mexico share a strong connection that which opposes this theory. Both human rights and the indigenous uprising aim to preserve diversity; human rights protects against the harmful effects of globalization that might jeopardize diversity and, similarly, the indigenous uprising tried to raise awareness against the dangerous effects of NAFTA. Albeit indigenous peoples were the most evident victims of colonialism, they showed that it is possible to create a project of human rights that embrace both diversity of cultures and respect for human dignity. Human rights, as George Ulrich proposes, is an unfinished project⁸ and as such it is constantly open for a new design that is both inclusive and respectful.

Discussions on this topic are usually top-down and come mainly from states or western human rights theorists, rarely reflecting the indigenous position on the issue. However, the Zapatista movement and indigenous uprising in Mexico, as a bottom-top movement, proved that minorities can stand on their own feet. It also shows they are able to politically organize themselves, respecting human rights, foreseeing a collective and joint participation in society whilst especially respecting their own culture. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960) stated that “inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence” although even long after the independence, western countries insisted in

⁸ Ulrich, G., ‘Universal Human Rights: An Unfinished Project’ in H. Kirsten (Ed), *Human Rights on Common Grounds: The Quest for Universality*, Hague, Kluwer Law International, 2001.

interfering in political affairs of sovereign countries and peoples by not only denying their right to self-determination but especially denying them the right and opportunity to contribute and enrich discussions such as the universality of human rights.

The self-determination expressed in the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) ideal was to give back the political expression to those affected by the inability to “freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”, because of colonialism, dissolution of empires or any other reason. Therefore, the indigenous movement in Mexico was an attempt to restore the political participation of minorities as well as their effective enjoyment of the public sphere and the democracy. However, in order to understand self-determination it is necessary to define who is entitled to it.

Who are the “peoples” described in the first article of the ICCPR? Peoples are the ones entitled to the right of self-determination in international law. However, the Covenant 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO)⁹ mentions in its article 1.3, that “the use of the term peoples in this Convention shall not be construed as having any implications as regards the rights which may attach to the term under international law.” Therefore, are indigenous considered peoples? Besides, are they entitled to the right of self-determination? States often reject the concept of indigenous *peoples* because it indicate they are communities entitled to self-determination within the borders of a sovereign country, an idea which might induce a fear of a separatist movement. In addition, the UNGA itself stated in the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States (1970 Declaration), when defining peoples that “[nothing shall be] construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples as described above and thus possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction as to race, creed or colour”. In light of this, self-

⁹ The Covenant 169 of the ILO concerns indigenous peoples and tribes in independent countries and came into force in 05 September 1991, being ratified by twenty-two countries, mainly Latin American countries.

determination, autonomy, the concept of indigenous and peoples share no true relation with separatism. This is proved by the fact that both declarations are still in force and albeit the 1970 Declaration explicitly discourage separatist aims, the most recent Covenant 169, attempt as a discriminatory legal framework by structuring the term “peoples” as non-owners of the right to self-determination.

Self-determination is the right that most relate to resistance against oppression from external interference. It is also usually related to colonial peoples whilst being controversial regarding other groups. However, from the previously exposed, one can draw two conclusions: firstly that minorities do not have the right to self-determination for not being considered “peoples”; and secondly that the indigenous are not considered peoples in the international law sphere and consequently do not hold the right to self-determination. Opposingly, the 1970 Declaration seems to implicitly relate the right of self-determination to John Locke’s right of revolution¹⁰ by stating that if the State fails to provide equal rights to minorities, self-determination might be the only way to restore the equality within society. As Castellino and Gilbert (2003) emphasize, “self-determination could be viewed as a remedy for minorities or the last recourse to rebellion against tyranny.” Accordingly, the authors continue, the Vienna Declaration of 1993 refers to the 1970 Declaration’ text previously quoted and add that “the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples and *thus possessed of a Government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction of any kind*”. In doing so, they suggest that if the government do not represent all the groups within a society indistinctly, the minorities have the right to rebel and demand for self-determination (Castellino and Gilbert, 2003). This brings democracy to the canvas.

What is the main goal of democracy? Certainly, it is to be a form of government wherein **all groups** feel *represented* and share a collective sense of belonging. Therefore, self-

¹⁰ John Locke in “Two Treatises of Government” invoked the Right of Revolution, meaning the right to resist against governments that acts contradicting citizen’s interests. Political power, according to social contract theory, establishes a relationship between citizens and the State in which the failure to accomplish a successful governance that respect democracy and provide a broad spectrum of rights could result in the overthrow of the Government.

determination as the last resort in order to pursue equal rights is clearly related to the main goal of democracy: pluralism. However, as previously stated, the “official”¹¹ model of democracy is a top-down system in which the citizens are *represented* by elected politicians that only *represent* their specific electorate. Therefore, what is the fate of the electorate whose representatives were not elected? Forgetfulness, or in other words: lack of *representation*. *Representation* according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary is: “1. the act or action of representing: the state of being represented: such as **a:** representationalism 2. **b** (1): the action or fact of one person standing for another so as to have the rights and obligations of the person represented (2): the substitution of an individual or class in place of a person (such as a *child* for a deceased parent)”. In light of this, representation is to empower (as in: *give the power to*) one single person (or group) whilst the others remain in passivity and assuming that they are incapable of owning the power to self-represent themselves, for instance, a child or a mentally ill person who needs a tutor to *represent* them or their civil rights. On the other hand, self-determination is about being able to freely pursue its own right but how can it be done in a system where only few have their rights represented?

When democracy comes to the spotlight, the first thing that comes to mind is the act of voting which is mandatory in some countries and voluntary in others, but it is always a highly discredited system. In Europe, the percentage of young people voting is considerably decreasing, as it is all over the globe. The passivity implied in the current democratic system requires peoples to blindly leave their political fate in the hands of their representatives who will be elected anyway, with or without their vote. Thus why bother? How to create a governing system where social engagement and active political participation build the tone of the government, foster the trust of citizens in the system and consequently increase the collective enjoyment of the public sphere?

In 21 March 1999, indigenous peoples in Mexico participated in a non-binding and unofficial national referendum on indigenous people’s rights as an attempt to reach a consensus and peace after the indigenous uprising. Using the polls as a sort of protest

¹¹ By “official”, I mean representative democracy, meaning the system of government in which people are represented by elected officials, opposing the system where people actively participate in the decision-making process.

against the regular elections, the referendum was a way to voice the concerns of minorities and, as expected, the majority of voters voted to demand the implementation of indigenous people's rights. The organizers of the referendum knew that active political participation is the feature required for a change to be made. However, the elected government chose to ignore the result. How can a democratic government thrive if the minorities' voices are never heard?

Democracy as an ideal is related to values such as pluralism and diversity, not to a formal governing system based on laws, norms, procedures and bureaucracy. Such ideal is based on a collective conscience of participation in the public sphere of society and enjoyment of the *res publica*, meaning that democracy is about effective participation, not representation. In "The Democratic Imagination: Envisioning Popular Power in the Twenty-first Century" (2012), James Irvine Cairns and Alan Sears analyses the concept of democracy from below, meaning that the power should belong to the people and actively exercised by the people. Representation, accordingly, might — and most likely will — have a negative effect on the promotion of minorities' rights by creating a gap between the voter and the decision-making process.

In face of the exposed, the question that arises is the long distance between the elector and the decision-making process, increasing the bureaucracy and decreasing the efficiency. First, the citizen goes to a voting poll, then they vote for a representative — usually someone that does not share the culture, religion, ethnic or economic/social status of the voters — in this system. This is the moment where the citizens feel their mission is accomplished. Afterwards, with the representative elected, they indicate experts in managing the political-administrative sectors of the State that will be the only link between the *representative* and the decision-making process, beginning then the bureaucracy in the representative democracy (Weber, 1991). After their successful election, the representatives will never consult the electorate again until the next polling. Besides, the citizens will lack the *conscience* to actively demand the elected representative and even considering that the citizens are politically empowered, the line of representation is ineffectively long and on top of it lay the representative, unattainable, above the "common people".

It is not the goal of this dissertation to criticize the “official” representative democracy, as it is comprehensible that it was a collective movement and a struggle that came from below, from minorities like workers, women and oppressed peoples, to guarantee the right for everyone to vote in elections and to choose representatives. However, societies are constantly changing and what is proposed in this thesis is that the governing system changes with and within the society, taking a closer look at its own peoples. Surely, the representative democracy is a great achievement, however the way it was conceived portrays a discriminatory system that propagate a class society based on inequality, unlike the democratic values and ideal proposed. The “tyranny of the majority” described by Tocqueville, summarizes the failure of the official representative democracy to guarantee the rights of minorities by comparing the majority rule with an authoritarian tyrant, in the sense that both possess absolute power which could lead to its abuse and/or misuse.

All over Latin America, courageous women and men fought to overthrow military dictatorships, and against the colonial rule and oppression of any kind. Therefore, why not give the real power to the people? Unlike a child or a mentally ill person who need to be represented, the citizens are able to consciously represent their own voice and actively participate in the decision-making process. The so widely used prefix “self” also applies to empowerment and political participation, the people is entitled to self-empowerment, self-determination and self-representation which is the case of the autonomous regions in Mexico.

The article 27 of the ICCPR states that “in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language”. In accordance to this article, another western concept rejected by the indigenous people’s uprising is the idea of nation state. The attempt to re-build a true national identity, in this case, involved the rejection of concepts imposed by the colonial rule, such as the nation state, in which the diversity of the Mexican nation should meet the effective political participation in the state.

The autonomous regions are a model of state in which the multi-ethnic groups that compose the Mexican society can express their voice, creating a “fourth level of governance that adds to the existing links between the government and citizens at the federal, state, and municipal levels. In essence, the proposal was aimed at promoting a new relationship between indigenous people and the state, increasing indigenous people’ political power, and overcoming the colonial legacy of fragmentation.” (Dean & Levi, 2003, p. 202). The “legacy of fragmentation” — a heritage of the nation state “common identity” — built a homogenised society wherein the assimilation of the European culture fragmented the origins and culture of indigenous people. Although aiming at fighting for their self-determination, the autonomous regions are the opportunity of indigenous people to “become true Mexicans for the first time” (Convención Nacional Indígena, 1994).

Instead of a separatist movement, the uprising in Mexico had the goal to fully integrate its people into the country, spread their culture and promote a true common identity of the Mexican nation, composed by indigenous people, mestizos, Europeans’ descendants and all their respective cultures. The complete integration is only possible when language, education, customs, societal structure and political model are respected in the public sphere, guaranteeing the perpetuation of one’s ethnicity and building a “Nation’s” common identity.

Whilst analyzing the process embodied in Mexico, the question that arises, meanwhile regards the political empowerment of indigenous people. How did this process start? In which context were minorities finally able to voice their concerns? How to replicate the indigenous experience in Mexico and empower minorities worldwide? The next chapters analyze the social change experienced by Mexican society in depth and propose an analysis of the model of democracy built by the indigenous peoples in Mexico. However, firstly a few questions need to be posed.

Both in Mexico and recently in Brazil during the protests of July 2013¹² for instance, the alternative media and the social media promoted the civil society spring, empowering

¹² The series of protests of July of 2013 in Brazil began after the price increase of public transportation and it was the first manifestation since the impeachment of Fernando Collor that had the support of the majority of the population. Later on, the protests changed the tone and began to demand more investments in social

people to actively demand for change. In Mexico, the internet was the embryo of the indigenous uprising and certain authors (Ortiz, 1997) consider the Zapatista Movement as one of the first cyberactivist expressions in the world. Although the official website was only launched in 1996, the EZLN started to raise awareness to the indigenous struggles in Mexico sending articles to Mexican newspapers, e.g La Jornada, El Financero, etc, and using this opportunity to reach international supporters. From this moment onwards, NGOs and international supporters stood beside the EZLN, sharing their articles and manifests online. The movement's aim to be online simply related to the idea of avoiding the forgetfulness of indigenous people's struggles as well as undermining the strategy of the President Salinas de Gortari of presenting to the world an "unreal country"¹³. Later, in 2002, the Radio Insurgente "La voz de los sin voz", a radio station made from and by the indigenous peoples whose programs are presented in five different Mayan languages as well as in Spanish, informing the people of three different regions about social and political issues of Mexico and indigenous peoples became the most important community radio in the region, not only empowering the indigenous communities by promoting information about gender equality, political rights and general human rights issues, but also informing regarding Mexican political situation.

In any democratic government, the media represents the link between the citizens and the public sphere. However the media can also pose a real threat to democracy. It requires a plurality and diversity of both media outlets and outputs in order to reach all groups within the society, otherwise the pluralism inherent of the democratic values could be jeopardized and minorities, once again, could face the lack of representation in the public

rights and transparency on public expenditure and actions. In response, the government announced measures to meet the demands of the society, the National Congress approved anticorruption measure, for instance, stating corruption as a heinous crime and prohibiting secret votes in the repeal of mandates accused of irregularities.

¹³ "Según nosotros, la estrategia de Salinas de Gortari dentro del neoliberalismo era construir una campaña de publicidad, presentando en el extranjero un país estable, um buen producto que estaba vendiendo. Si nosotros lográbamos afectar esa campaña publicitaria, íbamos a conseguir dos cosas: demostrar lo que realmente estaba pasando, lo que este proyecto político, económico, significaba para este país, para una parte del país, para los indígenas; pero además, íbamos a lograr que México mirara hacia su parte indígena y se diera cuenta de que estaba olvidando a una parte de él. Era una guerra contra el olvido. Pero no le veíamos ningún futuro militar ni político más allá de eso. Sabíamos que era una guerra desesperada; lo que tratábamos de hacer era que fuera lo más útil posible para la gente con la que estábamos en deuda: las comunidades indígenas." (Subcomandante Marcos, interviewed by Yvon Le Bot, 1997, *El Sueño Zapatista*)

sphere. In Mexico, the traditional media did not respect the democratic values and the community had to fight for their right to information, building community radios and creating a direct link between community leaders and society whilst also fostering the political participation of the latest and promoting the discontentment that erupt in the uprising.

The right to information, derived from the article 19 of the UDHR, guarantees that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”. As such, it constitutes a basic human right as it is a basic condition to pursue other rights, namely education, health and political rights. The violation of this right, just like the violation of the right to education, creates a vicious circle of conformism and detachment to the public sphere. However, in countries where the media promotes the disservice to democracy as an ideal, alternative media and social media are the alternative to promote the right to information to the citizens. According to the researched titled “The Impact of Social Media on Social Unrest in the Arab Spring”, social media played a central role in sharing ideals of freedom and democracy to Arab countries that fostered the social unrest which promoted the Arab Spring. Accordingly, “the results obtained do imply that the rapidly increasing rates of Internet penetration in MENA – and consequent availability of social media – did bolster existing popular engagement with anti-regime sentiments and consequent participation in protests. Social media can best facilitate protest participation when it builds upon existent social ties, such as those created in civil society groups”¹⁴. In Brazil, a similar role was played by social media in order to promote the series of protests of July 2013 and to raise awareness and supporters for major human rights violations perpetrated by the government.

The next chapter analyse the consequences of the indigenous uprising in Mexico, promoting a questioning regarding the democratic system and its effectiveness in establishing a plural and participative society.

¹⁴ Dewey, T., et al., *The Impact of Social Media on Social Unrest in the Arab Spring*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University, 2012, p. 41.

CHAPTER TWO

The stem: Analysing the structures of the problem

Political inequality is directly related to the values of democracy as it has to do with *voice*. In a politically equal society, all the citizens have the ability and possibility of *voicing* their concerns and effectively participating in the decision-making process, be it by voting or directly deciding. Voice is what makes citizens part of a democratic society. Voice is what promotes the citizenship. On the other hand, imagine a society wherein some groups do not have a voice and cannot express themselves because the existence of a mechanism to establish the dialogue with these groups is conditioned to the voice that they do not own. Voice, in this sense, is related to influence and participation, but also to the extent to which one's rights will be implemented and respected, meaning that a democratic society can only thrive if everyone has a voice. By contrast, political inequality is the inability to speak.

A research on political inequality titled *Explaining Voter Turnout in Latin America* (2012)¹⁵ demonstrated that socio-economic factors influences the political participation in Latin America. The study concludes that those who are below the poverty threshold are less likely to vote in elections and suggests that ethnicity and race do not constitute a direct factor to the political participation gap in Latin America. With this in mind, a World Bank study titled *Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Human Development in Latin America: 1994-2004*¹⁶, suggested that while the political participation have increased in the region, poverty rates do not follow the same trend. The study shows that being indigenous increases the probability of being poor, demonstrating that the probability in

¹⁵ "The results suggest that those who have no income at all tend to vote less than all the other respondents. In sum, the level of income does not matter, but destitute individuals vote less than the rest of the population. Since extreme poverty is more common in some Latin American countries than in the industrialized world, this is an interesting finding which is in line with our theoretical expectation." (C. Nestor and C. Miguel. *Explaining Voters Turnout in Latin America*. Comparative Political Studies, 2012)

¹⁶ H. Gillette, P. Harry A., *Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Human Development in Latin America: 1994-2004*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Mexico was of 30% in 2004, albeit in the early 1990s was 25% (2012). That is to say, that although ethnicity is not directly related to political inequality, poverty is. Accordingly, in Mexico, the indigenous population living in extreme poverty was of 30.6% and 41.7% of the indigenous peoples lived in moderate poverty, totalizing 72.3% or 8.2 million. Meanwhile, the non-indigenous population living below the poverty threshold was of 7.6% and 35% was considered moderately poor, totalizing 42.6% or 45.1 million¹⁷.

However, the conclusion is far from being obvious when analysing the data of electoral participation of Mexican states with the greatest percentage of indigenous population. According to the report *Regiones Indígenas de México*¹⁸, Yucatán and Puebla are amongst the states with the greatest presence of indigenous population (CDI, 2006, p. 139-145). However, both are also amongst the states with the greatest voters turnout. According to the Corporación Latinobarómetro, 85% and 73.3% of the Yucatán and Puebla citizens, respectively, voted in the 2012 election¹⁹. That is to say, despite the study by the World Bank, that the indigenous population in Mexico is somewhat politically empowered, although it still figures amongst the poorest groups in the country. The following analysis aim at understanding the phenomenon of empowerment and its effect on the political participation of minorities.

The movement to demand for effective participation of minorities in Mexico was a reflection of the 70 years rule of the political party Partido Revolucionário Institucional (PRI) in the country in which indigenous rights failed to be implemented and a forced cultural assimilation took place²⁰. Underrepresentation pained indigenous peoples until a collective movement voiced their concerns, demanding for democracy. The indigenous uprising was a mirror of years of oppression and struggles faced by indigenous minorities

¹⁷ National Evaluation Council of Social Development Policy, *Results of Poverty Measurement of 2012* (2012)

¹⁸ Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, *Regiones Indígenas de México*, 2006.

¹⁹ Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2013.

²⁰ In 1946 the Ministry of Education started an educational programme for indigenous children, teaching Spanish to them. Although education is a human right demanded by the indigenous peoples, the effect of this programme in special was a devaluation of indigenous languages and cultures.

in Mexico and was the beginning of the process of increasing political participation as a reflection of their empowerment.

The San Andrés accord signed by the EZLN and the Mexican government resonates the beginning of the peace talks whilst also being a milestone for indigenous rights by safeguarding indigenous autonomy, recognition and establishment of indigenous rights. Signed in 16 February 1996, the accord was based in four main tenets:

- “1. To urge a profound transformation of the State, as well as of the political, social, cultural, and economic relationships with the indigenous peoples, which satisfies their demands for justice.*
- 2. To urge the emplacement of an all-inclusive new social agreement, based on the understanding of the fundamental plurality of Mexican society and on the contribution that the indigenous people can make to national unity, beginning with the constitutional acknowledgement of their rights, and in particular, to their right to self-determination and autonomy.*
- 3. The legal reforms to be promoted must originate from the principle of the equality of all Mexicans before the law and judicial organs, and not by the creation of special codes of law that privilege particular people; respecting the principle that the Mexican Nation is a pluricultural entity which is originally supported by its indigenous peoples.*
- 4. The constitutional modifications represent one of the most important factors in the new relationship between the indigenous peoples and the State within the framework of reforming the State, so that their demands may find support within the State legal system.”*(San Andrés Accord, Chiapas (ME), 1996)

The accord, albeit not implemented by the government, served as a guideline for the respect of indigenous minorities, raising awareness to their demands. The accord — and specially the uprising — led to profound changes in the Mexican society and government, albeit insufficient. It promoted public policies and a change of mentality that perpetuates empowerment and political participation. Interestingly, the aforementioned tenet number three states that the legal reforms should follow the principle of equality between indigenous and non-indigenous, indicating that indigenous peoples refuse to be treated differently before law. Therefore, they should avoid laws with a paternalistic and assistencialism prone tone which would engender their right to self-determination. Despite being unable (or unwilling) to follow the tenet, the government established a set of assistencialism programmes aiming at the “inclusion” of indigenous peoples by systematically excluding them from the construction of the multicultural state.

The Plano Nacional de Población (National Plan of Population, from now on PNP) is the collection of “strategies, policies, actions and projects aimed at increasing the welfare of

families and the sustainable development of human settlements”²¹ which historically performed an involution regarding the approaches to indigenous rights and public policies. The PNP involution goes from an integrationist endeavour in the twentieth century to a reluctant participation opening that would go on to promote the indigenous assistencialism as an official public policy. Thus, the main purpose of the PNP has gone from promoting the active and organized participation of the indigenous peoples as subjects of their own development to attending to the sociodemographic lags that affect them (Arriaga and Ham, 2002).

Having said that, in the study titled *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race and Color in Latin America* (2014), Edward Eric Telles also describes the social distance faced by indigenous peoples in Mexico. According to his research, support for public policies to address unfair treatment to indigenous peoples is higher in Mexico than in any other country in Latin America. However, the country still lags behind in promoting public policies to their population. The study data indicates that more than 60% of the respondents believe that indigenous peoples are still poor in Mexico because they are unfairly treated and more than 90% are in favour of public policies directed to indigenous peoples. The data also suggests a majority support for readdressing indigenous inequality with anti-discrimination laws: teaching indigenous history in schools, protection of indigenous land and teaching indigenous languages to all children. Interestingly, on the point of teaching indigenous languages to all children, the self-identified as white and mestizos showed less support to this initiative, suggesting that indigenous groups are still highly stigmatized (Telles, 2014, p. 70). Therefore, the study previously mentioned indicates that albeit popular support exists, public policies are still insufficient, suggesting that a *democratic* country is failing to address popular demands.

Although regarded as insufficient, public and affirmative policies targeting inequality of indigenous groups will be discussed. However, in order to analyse the outcomes the contextualization of both concepts is necessary. Public policies are policies that aim to ensure rights to increase the effective enjoyment of citizenship and they often are

²¹ Consejo Nacional de Población, [website], 2014, <http://www.gob.mx/conapo/documentos/programa-nacional-de-poblacion>, (accessed 08 June 2017)

perceived as constitutional rights. In this specific case, public policies are governmental actions directed towards the **implementation** of laws, which includes the International Labour Organization' Covenant 169 and the ICCPR both ratified by Mexico and enjoy a higher status than federal laws. In this sense, public policies are nothing less than an obligation — or the avoidance of it — that all citizens should be perceived equally. Regarding Mexico, a multicultural nation, indigenous and non-indigenous should be entitled to same rights and duties. However, indigenous peoples and communities historically suffer from inequality, discrimination, forced cultural assimilation and all sorts of effects from colonialism that demand policies to assure their equality before law, which is the purpose of affirmative policies.

On the contrary, assistencialism is a policy that means quite the reverse of self-determination, liberation and democratization. According to Paulo Freire (2005, p. 12)

"Assistencialism is an especially pernicious method of trying to vitiate popular participation in the historical process. In the first place, it contradicts man's natural vocation as Subject in that it treats the recipient as a passive object, incapable of participating in the process of his own recuperation; in the second place, it contradicts the process of 'fundamental democratization'. The greatest danger of assistencialism is the violence of its anti-dialogue which by imposing silence and passivity denies men conditions likely to develop or to "open" their consciousness. For without an increasingly critical consciousness men are not able to integrate themselves into a transitional society, marked by intense change and contradictions. Assistencialism is thus both an effect and a cause of massification" (Freire, 2005, p.12)

The earnest analysis of the concept proposed by the Brazilian philosopher overall summarizes the rejection of assistencialism by indigenous peoples as an attempt to their right of self-determination and directly promote a paternalistic figure they are eager to avoid. The goal is autonomy and self-determination but in order to achieve those things public policies are necessary, although before promoting it the federal constitution of Mexico indicates that policies to promote the equality of indigenous peoples and communities should be designed and operated together with them.²²

Having said that, the commitment to promote the constitutional reforms proposed by the peace accords between the EZLN and the Mexican government was never truly held. In 2001, in fact, headed by the elected president Vicente Fox, in whose mandate the National

²² "Artículo 2º, B. La Federación, las entidades federativas y los Municipios, para promover la igualdad de oportunidades de los indígenas y eliminar cualquier práctica discriminatoria, establecerán las instituciones y determinarán las políticas necesarias para garantizar la vigencia de los derechos de los indígenas y el desarrollo integral de sus pueblos y comunidades, las cuales deberán ser diseñadas y operadas conjuntamente con ellos." (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1917)

Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) was created as a decentralized body of the government responsible to “make indigenous peoples visible”, a counter reform to indigenous rights was approved by the Congress in accordance with the three major political parties (PAN, PRI and PRD).

The counter reform was regarding the law COCOPA, a bill made by the Commission of Concord and Pacification (COCOPA) during the negotiation with the EZLN in which important aspects of the initial agreement were shed out to give way to private interests of the government, far from being of public interest. For instance, one of the main aspects of the COCOPA rejected by the Congress was regarding the right of association by indigenous peoples and communities. It meant that indigenous peoples would only be entitled to exercise the right of association within the municipal limits, disappearing with the possibility of regional or national association²³ and going against the increasing political participation indigenous peoples aimed for.

The demand for visibility (“nunca más un México sin nosotros”) was the main tenet of the uprising and it is the greatest demand in any popular movement led by minorities. Visibility is what the government fails to provide minorities with and it is also the trigger that lead minorities to protest. The claim for more visibility beyond being justified is also an imposition when analysing the constitutional evolution. It was only in the 1980s that the national constitution of Mexico established the country as a multicultural nation, setting forth in its second article that “the nation has a multicultural composition sustained originally by its indigenous peoples”, notwithstanding the fact that indigenous peoples constitute 10.45% of the population, according to the National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INGE)²⁴.

Later on, following the attempt to promote private interests regarding the rejection of the COCOPA agreement by the government, it attempted to appease public opinion by creating series of programmes to promote indigenous rights. For instance, the National

²³ The COCOPA agreement indicate that “the exercise of self-determination of the indigenous peoples will be respected in each of the areas and levels in which they assert their autonomy, being able to include one or more indigenous peoples, according to the specific circumstances of each federative entity”, however the approved text transcribed in the Constitution of Mexico is the following “indigenous communities, within the municipal level, may coordinate and associate in the terms and for the effects of the law”

²⁴ Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, México, 2010.

Programme for Development 2013-2018, also subordinated to the CDI. The unhidden goal of the programme is to foster the wellbeing of indigenous communities, guaranteeing respect and protection to civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. Moreover, it aims at the eradication of discriminatory practices and behaviour towards indigenous peoples by implementing projects of access to justice, advice in relation to criminal law, support to indigenous communicators, fostering gender equality, among others. One of the aspects of the programme is the focus given to the participation of indigenous peoples in implementing it through public consultation. For instance, the tenet five of the programme²⁵ establishes a goal of 80% in 2018 of participation of indigenous peoples and communities in the planning and management of their own community development. It indicates that the starting point was of 38.8% in 2013, although the effective participation of indigenous peoples in the parliament, for example, amounts to less than 3% of the totality of seats. Relating to it, as mentioned above, the constitution itself rejects any kind of association in a regional or national level, a feature that alone could improve the participation of indigenous peoples in the management of indigenous communities' development.

The failure to meet CNI and EZLN's demands for effective political participation²⁶ paved the way for constitutional reforms regarding the parliamentary representation of indigenous groups. Political parties proposed reforms to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples in political parties, as was the case of the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM) that proposed the following reform:

“Article 53. In order to establish the demarcation of single-member electoral districts, the location of indigenous peoples must be adjusted to ensure their participation and political representation.

Article 54. VIII - Each political party must accredit the participation of individuals of ethnic origin proportionally to the indigenous population of each plurinominal circumscription according to the last

²⁵ Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos. *Programa Especial de los Pueblos Indígenas*. México, CDI, 2014.

²⁶ “Ampliación de la participación y representación políticas. Fortalecimiento Municipal. § Es conveniente prever a nivel constitucional los mecanismos necesarios que: a) Aseguren una representación política adecuada de las comunidades y pueblos indígenas en el Congreso de la Unión y en los Congresos locales, incorporando nuevos criterios en la delimitación de los distritos electorales que corresponden a las comunidades y pueblos indígenas; b) permitan su participación en los procesos electorales sin la necesaria representación de los partidos” (IILSEN, 2001, p. 99)

census of population, in order to assure the representation of the indigenous towns in the Congress Of the Union” (IILSEN, 2001, p. 180)²⁷.

The reform proposed by PVEM did not pass. However, later on, political parties would adjust the proposal and include it in the parties statutes ensuring that indigenous peoples and minorities had their representation guaranteed in the party²⁸ and consequently in public offices. Accordingly, the General Council of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) approved a delimitation of three hundred federal electoral districts using the criteria of ethno-linguistics. Such delimitation originated twenty-eight districts with a percentage of indigenous population over 40%, known as “indigenous districts” (INE, CG182, 2014), matching the proposal of the San Andrés accord regarding affirmative policies for political participation of indigenous peoples. However, the indigenous peoples are still underrepresented in the political sphere, which might as well explain the reasons behind the strict relation between indigenous peoples and poverty. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) despite the 500 seats in the parliament, only 14 indigenous occupy them, accounting for only 2.8% of the totality of seats. From those 14 seats only four are occupied by women. It is in this scenario that the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and the EZLN decided to hold an assembly to choose an indigenous woman to run for presidency in the next elections of 2018.

The goal of the CNI to indicate an indigenous woman to represent indigenous issues is also related to the fact that albeit affirmative actions to include indigenous and minorities in political parties and, therefore in public offices, exists, political parties are using the indigenous identity to increase the party’s seats in parliament, instead of meeting

²⁷ “Artículo 53. Para establecer la demarcación de los distritos electorales uninominales, se deberá ajustar a la ubicación de los pueblos indígenas, a fin de asegurar su participación y representación política. Artículo 54. fracción VIII.- Cada partido político deberá acreditar la participación de individuos de origen étnico de forma proporcional a la población indígena de cada circunscripción plurinominal según el último censo de población, a fin de asegurar la representación de los pueblos indígenas en el Congreso de la Unión” (IILSEN, 2001, p. 180).

²⁸ The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)’ statute guarantee in its article 175 that “in the federal and state processes by both principles, in the geographical boundaries in which the majority of the population is indigenous, the Party will promote the nomination of candidates representing the predominant peoples and indigenous communities.” (Estatuto del PRI 2014 (ME) p93) As well. The Partido de la Revolución Democrática established that the party “recognized the plurality of the mexican society and will guarantee the participation of indigenous, migrants, genders, among other sectors in its directive bodies, as well as representation in popular elections office in the terms of the present statute and regulations” (Estatuto del PRD, 2015 (ME) p4).

indigenous demands and improve indigenous rights. Responding to the right of self-determination, indigenous peoples and communities before watch the indigenous rights fade away with the misrepresentation in parliament, employed means of political management and decision-making that not only raise indigenous concerns but also *de facto* implement it.

Juntas de Buen Gobierno and the Caracoles

The indigenous peoples in Mexico believe that community and collectiveness are far more important than individuality, which is the concept behind the Juntas de Buen Gobierno (Good Government Councils, from now on ‘council’). These councils are responsible for the political management of the indigenous communities in the level above the municipality, meaning that the government is structured taken into consideration the indigenous community first, the autonomous municipality second and, above it all, the councils. (Espinoza, 2006, p. 221) Each council has four jurisdictions: the Direction, the Commissions, the Coordinators and the Operational.

The direction is mainly responsible for the decision-making. The body is composed by delegates from the circumscribed area of the council jurisdiction and the mandates last only one week promoting a constant turnover of delegates, allowing that every member of the council become a delegate at some point. Interestingly, the mandates are not paid because the communal sense of the indigenous culture understand that the community service is a responsibility of every member of the community. It is also possible to revoke the mandate in case the delegate does not meet pre-established parameters of good governance. The commissions are responsible to promote the decisions of the direction and they are usually divided into specific themes related to the needs of each jurisdiction. Moreover, the commissions hold autonomy from the direction but they collaborate if necessary. The coordinators and the operational promote the ground work, while the coordinators manage the education and health centres and the operational team effectively promotes health and education in each jurisdiction, taking care of health clinics and of the ill, for instance. Additionally, the councils also have commercial centres that promote the economic development of the communities.

On the other hand, the Caracoles are public spaces in which the exchange of ideas between community and “government” promotes the decision-making in the council sphere. The caracoles are the encounter of the civil society and the government as spaces for indigenous peoples to express their voices freely and reach agreements regarding the management of their own community, promoting in practice the concepts of autonomy and self-determination. The councils and the caracoles are extraordinary examples of the increment of citizens’ enjoyment of public spaces and consequently of their citizenship. (Caldeira, 2000)

All things considered, it is part of the indigenous culture to establish means of participation to every single person, especially the youth and women, meaning that in a communal system, such as the indigenous, participation is necessary in order to reach agreements which are based in the consensus. The participation in public spaces raises awareness to social, political and development issues that “foster the co-responsibility between government and civil society” (Espinoza, 2006, p. 223).

The councils are also based on the concept of “Para todos, todo. Para nosotros, nada”, which could be translated to “To everyone, all. To us, nothing”, meaning that the individuality or “private clubs” are not rewarded. In fact, they are systematically rejected. For instance, the councils and the caracoles do not accept donation directed to a specific person or community. Instead, the donation received will be subject to a board meeting in which together they will decide which community is in most need of it. Additionally, to all the projects developed by each council or caracol a tax fee of 10% is applied which will be addressed to the community that need it the most, balancing and performing an income distribution which keeps everyone equal and entitled to everything, “para todos, todo”.

Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI) and Indigenous Governing Council

The CNI was established in October 1996 after the signature of the peace accords between government and EZLN. It was a space where indigenous peoples from Mexico could gather and promote not only indigenous rights but also resistance against oppression.

Representing forty-three²⁹ peoples and tribes, the CNI held until 2017 five general meetings, the last one held in October 2016 in which it was decided that a consultation will be carried out in December 2016 regarding the formation of an indigenous governing council headed by an indigenous woman. The consultation had the participation of five hundred and twenty-three communities, twenty-five states and forty-three indigenous peoples³⁰ who decided for the governing council.

Following the consultation on the last weekend of May 2017, indigenous communities and peoples of Mexico gathered in assembly to elect the governing council — headed by an indigenous woman — to run for presidency as an independent candidate. Besides electing the candidate and the council, the assembly also discussed its purposes and strategies; its functioning and organization; and the linkage of the Indigenous Governing Council with other sectors of civil society. The head of the governing council, María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, was called ‘vocera’: a person with voice, a person who speaks, who when questioned about the elections said “we will participate in the 2018 presidential elections, but not with the goal of winning and taking power, but instead as a platform to help indigenous people further organize” indicating that the council’s platform is about empowering indigenous people and working together, instead of “winning and taking power”.

Accordingly, the governing council was built to promote a national articulation to indigenous concerns and to give voice to indigenous communities. However, rather than being part of the official government, the governing council purpose was to gather indigenous communities in the CNI and begin a new model of governing system even before the election. For them, winning the election does not matter to the main purpose, which has a higher aspiration and follows the seven principles of ‘mandar obedeciendo’

²⁹ Amuzgo, Binnizá, Chichimeca, Chinanteco, Chol, Chontal de Oaxaca, Chontal de Tabasco, Coca, Comcac, Cuicateco, Cucapá, Guarajío, Ikoots, Kumiai, Lacandón, Mam, Matlazinca, Maya, Mayo, Mazahua, Mazateco, Mixe, Mixteco, Nahua, Ñahñú/Najtho/Ñuhu, Náyeri, Popoluca, Purépecha, Rarámuri, Sayulteco, Tepehua, Tepehuano, Tlapaneco, Tohono Oódham, Tojolabal, Totonaco, Triqui, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Wixárika, Yaqui, Zoque, Afromestizo and Mestizo.

³⁰ *Concejo Indígena de Gobierno*, [website], 2016, <http://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/concejo-indigena-de-gobierno/>, (accessed 09 June 2017)

(lead by obeying)³¹. According to the release to “the people of the world, the free media outlets and the international and national Sexta” posted on the EZLN website (2016), the governing council ratifies that “our struggle is not for power, we do not seek it; [...] Do not mistaken us, we do not intend to compete with political parties because we are not the same, we are not their lying and perverse words. We are the collective word from below and to the left, the word that shakes the world when the earth trembles with epicenters of autonomy.” (2016)

The election of the governing council was based on the democracy from below — or community-based democracy — and had the following configuration. Firstly, as indicated above, the CNI called the indigenous peoples, communities, supporters and civil society, through an announcement to be part of the assembly. Secondly, the indigenous peoples, communities and invited guests constituted delegates and participated in four working groups that would agree upon four main tenets of the governing councils, regarding strategies, organization and functioning of the council. Thirdly, one of the working group would elect the council and the spokeswoman (vocera) and they would all finally present — together and by consensus — the results of the working groups and ask for approval of the peoples gathered in assembly. The council was constituted by one councilwoman and councilman from each language of the different regions and communities belonging to the CNI (2017). The councilpersons were elected following the usage and customs of each and every indigenous community autonomously.

Following this rationale, the indigenous peoples that gathered in assembly constituted different groups with different languages, culture and backgrounds, who aiming at a greater good — “nunca más un Mexico sin nosotros” (never again a Mexico without us) — and a greater enjoyment of the public sphere, agreed among themselves and constituted a governing council to declare their voice starting from below, from the local communities. The power here is in the lower level of society, not in the governing council itself, which is uniquely a reunion of peoples to symbolize a national coalition whilst the

³¹ “To obey, not to rule; to represent, not to supplant; to propose, not to impose; to serve, not to be served by; go down, not up; build, not destroy; to convince, not to win” (Zapatista principle of government)

decision-making is placed in the community-level, among the communities and peoples that share the same language, culture and backgrounds. Therefore, they are aware of the community's needs and aspirations and thus able to propose effective solutions, which is the basic logic of the democracy from below concept.

Democracy from below

The indigenous uprising in Mexico had as their motto the phrase “another world is possible” which might look utopian at first but summarizes perfectly the concept of democracy from below. Cairns and Sears (2012) wrote “there is another sense of democracy, in which the people exercise effective power themselves rather than simply participating in the choice of who will govern over them [...] Democracy from below is driven by the familiar activist slogan: another world is possible.” In fact, democracy from below should be portrayed as a pair of glasses to see through the social, economic and political relations; a new world yet to be built based on a new vision of (and from the) society. Another world is definitely possible, but in order for this to be implemented, democracy from below requires not only an evolution from the official model of democracy, but mainly it requires changes in the society’s daily decision making power.

Democracy is not only a form of government but also a way of perceiving our daily life and how much responsibility we have for the direction of our own life as co-authors with effective participation in the decision-making process. In order to be part of a functioning democratic system people should be entitled to be part of the decision-making process on matters which are important to their own “pursue of happiness”, or as Cairns and Sears (2012) poses, it is hardly believable that students would “choose to pay thousands of dollars in tuition every year if they had the option of choosing to go to school for free”. This expresses the extent in which our daily life is driven by *representatives* that mainly do not represent the electorate as a whole or promote policies that goes against the interests of the same electorate. Therefore, the question is for whom are the *representatives* governing?

A major criticism regarding the official democratic system has been driving democracy to a dramatic crisis of hopelessness which decreases the voters turnout and poses the question of legitimacy of the current form of government. The important aspect to keep

in mind is that democracy, as well as human rights, is an “unfinished project” (Ulrich, 2001, p. 195) that is “inherently debatable and changeable” (Arblaster, 1994, p. 6). Democracy from below does not have an established model yet and as such must be built taking into consideration the from below perspective.

Pippa Norris’ (2012) analysis of the “democratic deficit” indicate as a reproduction (and indicator) of it the distrust in democratic institutions, corruption, skepticism and cynicism in the political system which produces a bipolarity in society’s collective imagination. To some extent, people are anaesthetized towards the political sphere and unwilling to vote. On the other hand, people are actively engaging in protests on a daily basis in every democratic (and non-democratic) country worldwide. Albeit the protests begin as a vague demonstration of general dissatisfaction, the bipolar syndrome towards the political system composes a broader framework of the system’ crisis. From a symptom of dissatisfaction, democracy from below arises as a form of insurgency against injustice and aspiration of collective self-government. Cairns and Sears (2012) wrote that “the core of democracy from below is direct decision making by those who will be affected by choices about how to organize social life.” This does not mean that democracy from below imagines a society free from all problems (Chomsky 2011: 238; Eagleton 2011: 64-106). It means that problems are addressed within a system based on a more expansive conception of freedom, voluntary association, and collective self-government.” Taking this into consideration, not only the indigenous uprising in Mexico could be an example, but also, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, the uprising of July 2013 in Brazil, the students protests in Chile and in Ukraine, among various other in the Global South and Global North.

Considering the Global South, the Ukrainian student demonstration of 2013, for instance, sought out by social media networks, had as a primary intention to force the Former President Viktor Yanukovych and Former Prime Minister Mykola Azarov to sign an association agreement with the European Union (EU). The 93-days revolution commenced without clear political objectives or organization, the intention to join EU rather had a “shallow” motive instead of a well-though political agenda. The mobilization itself started as a social gathering and to some extent the participants even mentioned the

word “party”³². However, after a few days the state police oppression provoked a general dissatisfaction and a feeling of misrepresentation that fostered the organization of clear and defined political demands. The dissatisfaction with the government triggered the insurgency that promoted an organized movement of collective self-governance and democratic aspirations, demanding decision-making in accordance with popular demands. From the example above it is clear that the government was failing to meet popular demands made by the ones who elected them in a democratic representative system.

Democracy from below is an active and participatory governing system in which democracy, meaning popular power, reproduces the action of speak and makes sure one is being heard. Accordingly, as exposed above, it should be exercised in every branch of life as an empowering mechanism in itself. Important decisions have been made by the electorate with little or no say by them, challenging the representative role of official democracy. Taking as an example the United States 2016 presidential election, wherein Donald Trump was elected with 46.1% of popular votes, while Hillary Clinton received 48.2%, thus the “majority”. However, note that neither one of them received 50% of the popular votes whilst the voter turnout was only of 57.9%³³. Official democracy is based on an electoral system that theoretically respects the majority rule, meaning that the winner is the one who receives the majority of votes. Therefore, the representatives have the legitimacy to govern based on the majority will, although usually there is no legal provision requiring the support of more than 50% of the electorate, excluding the presidential election. Moreover, taking into consideration the 2017 French National Assembly elections, the *majority* of the Assembly, in terms of party support, constitutes merely 28% of the seats³⁴. In this sense, it is hard to believe in the legitimacy driven by the majority rule of the contemporary democratic system.

³² *Winter on Fire: Ukraine’s Fight for Freedom*, dir. Evgeny Afineevsky, USA, 2015, [Netflix]

³³ Election Guide, [website], 2016, <http://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2370/>, (accessed 14 June 2017)

³⁴ R. Alissa, *Emmanuel Macron’s Party on Track to Claim Majority in France’s Parliament*, [website], 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/11/world/europe/france-legislative-elections-emmanuel-macron.html>, (accessed 14 June 2017)

Coupled with the absence of representation expressed in the system above, another key thing to remember is that *representation* in the contemporary democratic system is far from actually representing all groups within a society. Once more, considering the French National Assembly composition, only 26% of the seats are women³⁵, while 51.3% of the population declare themselves as women.³⁶ Likewise, 12.6% of the ethnic minority in France was represented by 1.5% in the French National Assembly in 2012.³⁷ Cairns and Sears (2012) proposed a practical experience to understand the failure of official democracy to represent all branches of society. Suggesting the TV show *American Idol* as an example, the authors analysed the aspects of winning the contest by popular vote.

"The logic of the show is clear and seems fair. Millions of individual Americans have voted for their favourite singer, and the one with the most votes on the final night wins. So, if America has spoken, why are the winners generally bland middle-of-the-road singers? [...] The majority of the finalists are pop or country singers, most are white, and virtually all speak English as their first language. [...] Despite the show's claim to represent America's musical taste by inviting all TV-watchers to vote, its form goes some distance to ensuring that certain tastes are reproduced and others are hidden. Certain people will see themselves reflected in the bodies and tastes of the contestants; others will find it difficult to feel that they are being represented on the screen."

The example given by the authors perfectly illustrate the paradox of representation in the contemporary democratic system. The musical taste in the United States is far more diverse than pop or country music, yet these are considered by the show and the viewers the representation of the country's musical style because it was elected by the majority of popular vote.

In light of the exposed above, can the official democracy be considered a government "from the people and by the people"? Considering the absence of effective representation, the democratic system existent neither respects the majority of the population will nor it represents its diversity. Therefore, it is possible to consider that it propagates a class system and social, political and economic inequalities that not only perpetuates human rights violations but also makes it harder to promote a human rights system.

The co-relation between underrepresentation and the propagation of a class system is related to the argument that given the exclusive (opposing inclusive) presence of a certain

³⁵ National Assembly, [website], 2017, <http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/deputes/liste/homme-femme>, (accessed 14 June 2017)

³⁶ Population, female (%) of total), [website], 2015, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS>, (accessed 14 June 2017).

³⁷ A., Lucas, 'Ethnic Minorities in Politics and Public Life', Briefing Paper, SN01156, 28 June 2016, p. 9.

group of society in power, the governmental focus, public policies and attention will be directed towards the same group. At the same time, it excludes other groups from participating not only in the decision-making process but also in the promotion of a plural system responsible to represent every group within a society. Consequently, it decreases the power of underrepresented groups and increases their marginal presence in society (Anderson, 2008, p. 3; Chomsky, 1970).

Accordingly, the report “Political Inequality: why British democracy must be reformed and revitalised” suggested:

“[...] nearly two out of three working class citizens surveyed do not believe democracy in Britain adequately addresses their interests, a significantly worse gap than middle-class voters. Arguably partly as a result of this sense of exclusion – whether real or perceived – increasing numbers are removing themselves from participation in electoral politics. Moreover, as we have seen, electoral inequality is a problem that is getting worse: as explained, turnout differentials between classes and demographic groups have got significantly worse over time, since the 1980s and are predicted to continue at the next general election. Such differentials in turn create a vicious circle of underrepresentation and disaffection, propelling a sense that the political system no longer works for ordinary people or is capable of representing their interests. Consequently, the less powerful or effectively represented too often resile themselves to self-disenfranchisement, while their richer peers find government more responsive to their interests. Moreover, extensive political inequality also raises the question of whether elected representatives can claim to be sufficiently representative of the population as a whole when an increasingly narrow section of society elects them. Political inequality, then, reinforces the hollowing out of democracy and reflects clear class inequalities in political participation and the exercise of political power.” (IPPR, 2014, p. 19)

In this sense, do we need *representation* or *participation*? Democracy from below questions the official model and proposes “another world” that not only is self-governed but also represents the plurality of society’s viewpoint in every aspect of daily life. In doing so, it opposes the contemporary democracy model as a distorted system designed as the only possible form of government in which human rights and freedom could be perceived. However, like in human rights, democracy is constantly evolving. Appropriately, Rousseau, poses a disquieting question regarding representation:

“Sovereignty, for the same reason as makes it inalienable, cannot be represented; it lies essentially in the general will, and will does not admit of representation: it is either the same, or other; there is no intermediate possibility. The deputies of the people, therefore, are not and cannot be its representatives: they are merely its stewards, and can carry through no definitive acts. Every law the people has not ratified in person is null and void — is, in fact, not a law. The people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing. The use it makes of the short moments of liberty it enjoys shows indeed that it deserves to lose them.” (Rousseau, 1762, p. 141)

Having said that, if representation is caging the democratic values, participation is promoting the opposite. After the earthquake of 1985 in Mexico City, the government

failed to take action, leaving the city in pieces. The consequences of the earthquake were devastating for the peripheral and poorer region of the city, where a group of people gathered in neighbourhood assemblies (Assembleas de Barrios) and coordinated the popular movement called “Damnificados” that aimed to “reconstruct the city from below”³⁸ against what was called “the vacuum of governmental power”. Civil society took the power to organize and rule the city during the absence of the elected government by organizing themselves in neighbourhoods and each one was responsible for oneself when it came to decision-making and organization procedures whilst communicating with the other neighbourhoods through popular-chosen agents.

Another from-below experience is the participatory budgeting (OP) in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil. The OP is a direct decision-making by the population itself regarding the budget from the municipal administration and its application in public expenditure. The assemblies take place in the seventeen municipal regions where the population directly choose the priorities for which the budget should be applied, the counsellor and the number of city delegates that will represent the city in regional forums. The interesting aspect of the OP is that, taking into consideration the process of 2016/2017, every region decided between four main priorities in which the government should focused in each region, for instance the Region 01 voted that the priority should be housing, while the Region 02 chose health as the main focus of the government in that region.³⁹ This means that if the decision-making was not made by the ones directly affected by it, the development of the region would be impaired, in the sense that public policies would be direct towards the wrong track.

Numerous experiences of democracy from below are increasingly being put in practice in urban spaces and communities. However, the question is whether it is possible to promote effective participation in a large-scale community, as a country for example. I believe it is but only if some concepts we are tangled with are re-conceptualised. The

³⁸ J. Cueva, ‘Cuando los ciudadanos tomaron la ciudad en sus manos’, *La Jornada*, 11 September 2005, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2005/09/11/mas-jesus.html> (accessed 15 June 2017)

³⁹ Prefeitura de Porto Alegre, Funcionamento Geral, 2017, [website], http://www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/op/default.php?p_secao=15, (accessed 15 June 2017)

following chapter aims at provide guidelines and recommendations based on the indigenous experience in Mexico in order to build an operative democracy from below.

CHAPTER THREE

Flourishing the concept

“[...] I am merely giving the reasons why modern peoples, believing themselves to be free, have representatives, while ancient peoples had none. In any case, the moment a people allows itself to be represented, it is no longer free: it no longer exists” (Rousseau, 1762)

Professor Gustavo Esteva Figueiroa once told me that a government exists to harmonize the dreams, repair the collective efforts and transform conflicts. Harmonize the dreams means to be a form of government that respects and speaks for every group within a society; repair the collective efforts meaning that a government should be managed taking into consideration the collective movements and its efforts of collectiveness and; transform conflicts meaning that instead of solving the conflicts, the government should transform them, always considering the sense of justice. This is the goal of a new form of democracy. The intention of this work is not to create a model. Rather, it is to encourage a new mentality to overcome the collective struggles faced by democracy and to build guidelines to be followed or suggestions to be discussed, aiming at constructing another world... from below. The main idea of this chapter is whilst based on the indigenous experience with democracy from below in Mexico and its lessons to build “another world where many worlds fit”.⁴⁰

In order to perceive the basis of the following guidelines some preconceived concepts should be restructured. First of which is the concept of City as an administrative division of a country. Pereira (2001) questions why the word ‘city’ would have gone through centuries without change, even though it refers to an object in perpetual change. Lencioni (2008) suggests that the idea of ‘city’ is clear; however, its concept is not, meaning that ‘city’ as a concept is simply an imaginary one that can relate to both small urban

⁴⁰ “Un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos” is the Zapatista motto, meaning that their struggle is to build a world where different worlds/people/groups fit together.

agglomerates and megalopolis. In this sense, considering that the word ‘city’ has an imaginary concept and the object ‘city’ is in constant change, the challenge of this idea should be an object of discussion in order to achieve a collective agreement regarding its function and organization. Theorists of the democracy from below find it hard to perceive it in large-scale. However, challenging preconceived concepts of contemporary administrative division could help building a democratic system from below by imagining small administrative units and local power units that makes it affordable to foresee a democratic system where people have the power, instead of representatives.

The second aspect - that is not *per se* a concept - is the individuality inherent to the contemporary democratic system. In order for a democratic system to be truly democratic, it should be based on collectiveness: a communal sense of work for the collective good, for the public sphere and for the whole instead of the individual. It should contradict the basic idea of the current electoral system in which ‘each vote counts’ and reject the democratic values that are based on the principle that ‘each vote counts’ as long as it belongs to a whole.

Having said that, democracy should be designed as a honeybee hive. Honeybees are social insects that can only survive in community. If one honeybee hive cell is in dysfunction the colony can collapse. Analogically, democracy should be perceived in the same way. Like the beehives, the organization of society’s form of government must take into consideration that the government constitutes a space for interaction between individuals, a space of cooperation that shapes the individuals rather than having a shape imposed by someone else’s experience. Accordingly, democracy is a reflection of the cooperation between individuals, creating a community where the only way of succeeding is collectively through cooperation and active participation. Rousseau (1762) wrote that the origins of the word ‘democracy’ go back to a system where people gathered in assemblies and actively discussed topics subject to collective approval; without representation, they themselves discussed, proposed and voted important topics for the community as a whole. Although Athenians considered only few as citizens and part of the decision-making process, it is interesting to see that democracy was born as an active process of popular participation.

The origins of the word ‘parliament’ date back to the 11th century old French “Parlement”, meaning literally a place to ‘*parler*’ or, in the English translation, ‘*to discuss*’ or ‘*to talk*’. In the same sense, the word ‘assembly’ also date back to the old French meaning, relating to ‘a gathering of persons, a group gathered for some purpose’⁴¹. Both words are related to the original purpose of democracy, in which the Athenians gathered in *assembly* to *discuss* the organizational procedure of the society.

Having said that, the Tojolabales, Mayan indigenous people, perceive the words ‘speak’ and ‘listen’ in a way that can help Western societies to understand the purpose of *discussion* in a democracy. For them, the word *ab’al* means - at the same time - to speak and to listen. There is no possible way to speak without listening; and the opposite is also true, no one can listen without being provided the opportunity to speak.⁴² Following this rationale, in a democratic society everyone should speak their voices but also listen to others voices and concerns, analysing and discussing until a consensus is achieved. All things considered, the lessons learnt from Mexican indigenous’ organizational procedure and democracy from below formed the base for the following.

The local level

Taking the indigenous experience in Mexico in consideration, the important aspect of a working democracy from below is the sense of being able to speak and being heard as well as the feeling that effective participation creates a sense of belonging to the community. Accordingly, the local level is not only the right space for decision-making, it is also the only possible one, considering that is the closest level to the people which can speak and be heard. In this sense, one must consider the principle of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity and community-based governance have been praised as good practices regarding numerous contemporary problems, such as environmental issues. Relating to economic, social and environmental issues the globalization brought about, Schumacher

⁴¹ Online Etymology Dictionary, [website], <http://www.etymonline.com/>, (accessed 17 June 2017)

⁴² “[...] Hay, pues, particularidades entre las dos que exigen conceptos distintos para diferenciar estas dos clases de lengua: la escuchada de la hablada. Se refieren a acontecimientos no idénticos, son el escuchar y el hablar o decir. No se dan simultáneamente en la misma persona. Se presuponen al menos dos personas que se comunican al referirse al hablar y escuchar. Ninguna de las dos es más importante que la otra. Sin hablar no se escucha nada, y sin escuchar se habla al vacío.” (L. Carlos, *Aprender a escuchar: enseñanzas Maya-tojolabales*, Ciudad de México, PyV editores, 2008, p. 59)

(1973) invoked subsidiarity as a key principle for a successful large-scale organization. The author believed that large-scale not only dehumanise people but also economy. Subsidiarity is the “principle that governance decisions should be made as close as possible to the people who are affected by them” (Talus, 2016, p. 8) which is the case of the CNI.

From the experience of the indigenous peoples, one thing is certain: small-scale procedures seems to be always more democratic. As exposed in the previous chapter, the CNI (indigenous higher council) meetings are held sporadically and leaves the decision-making to the uses and costumes of each indigenous community. The decision-making is then taken to the higher council when absolutely necessary to the well-being of the indigenous people in Mexico as a whole. In this sense, democracy should follow such configuration using the subsidiarity principle wherein the decision-making is done preferentially by the local level.

However, the local level itself might be subject to scrutiny on its indefinite concept. In the democracy scholarship, local level is generally related to the city level or the lower level of the public administration apparatus. However, in contemporary urban studies the ‘city’ level can be as populated and diverse as a country itself. For instance, the city of São Paulo has 12.04 million inhabitants and the country of Lebanon has 5.851 million inhabitants. The decision-making at local level in São Paulo might be challenging if the concept of ‘local level’ maintain its relation to the concept of ‘city’.

The local level for indigenous peoples in Mexico is pliable to distinguish given that it is related to the communities in which the people share the language, culture and costumes. Promoting a pliable concept for local level in spaces where people usually do not share anything other than the address is challenging. However, the decision-making at local level should relate to citizens of a specific public space who are aware of the needs and aspirations of such region and not necessarily people with the same features and backgrounds as democracy, as a form of government, is about managing diversity.

In this sense, what this work proposes is to rethink city as the local level. What if instead of dividing the local level into cities, it was based on the number of inhabitants? For example, instead of one city hall for the entire city of São Paulo, each group of a given

number of inhabitants would have an assembly hall where discussions and agreements could take place. Such division would consider the geographical location of each group, meaning that the division would be based on the neighbourhood sharing the borders within a pre-defined region.

Dividing large spaces of administrative power into small units of power has the advantage of locating the decision-making near the population. Also, the power itself would belong to the people and as such would be dissipated whilst avoiding the concentration of power and its abuse. However, one also could argue that this proposal would create so many local powers that it would be impossible to communicate with them all and reach agreements regarding collective matters. In this regard, based on the Athenian' experience, a council with alternating delegates chosen by lottery and with a specific mandate would discuss the collective matters that are absolutely unfeasible to solve in the local level. For that to work, each delegate would be personally responsible, civil and criminally, for their misrepresentation. Also, before each agreement the delegate must meet with their region and present the proposal for consensual approval. Accordingly, it is important to remember that the CNI' meetings are held with each and every indigenous community, meaning forty-three communities with different languages, costumes and cultures, that participate collectively in the decision-making procedure. However, as the proposal points out, the CNI council only meets sporadically, leaving the decision-making for the local level.

The demands raised by the community are presented before the governing council in each assembly where the community itself elects the priorities and the way the demands will be addressed. For instance, ways to address the disappearance of indigenous peoples and political prisoners are constantly an issue in the indigenous communities and for that the people voted that the community should go to Mexico City and perform a series of demonstrations until someone of the “official” government meet their demands. Also, the procedure regarding the organization of the community follows the same method, always respecting the community voice. The community council (Juntas de Buen Gobierno) receives the *input* of the community during the assemblies and translates it into public policies. Before these are implemented, the council presents it once again to the

community which has to approve it by consensus and only then the council has the legitimacy to create the *outputs* from the original demands. (Easton, 1965)

Another interesting aspect of the indigenous decision-making is the ability to share experiences not only with indigenous peoples of the world but also with international non-indigenous supporters. The communities are always open to dialogue with anyone who shows interest in helping the collective project. As an example, during the assembly of the national indigenous congress, a number of international supporters, intellectuals, professors and opinion influencers were invited to participate as delegates and share their experience and knowledge in order to help the indigenous peoples to build a governing council with as much knowledge and expertise about the topic as possible. Besides, every community has a school and language courses which receive international students and teachers aiming at building a space for shared knowledge. In accordance with the collective-based mentality, the people themselves have the wisdom and by sharing it with other peoples, cultures issues of any kind can be discussed until an agreement is achieved, helping the community level to improve by sharing experiences.

The *sharing* approach can also be noted in the project of economic development in every community. For instance, the income distribution is called “brotherly tax” and aims at *sharing* the “economic support” received by the communities. Every community that received support for a project must share 10% of the income with the local council who will analyse which community needs it most, aiming at balancing the economic development of the region.⁴³ As noted, not only the knowledge sharing is of utmost importance and will be analysed further but it is also important to remark that the proposal hereby suggested will have to deal with different levels of local development. Therefore,

⁴³ “Ya no se permitirá que los donativos y apoyos de la sociedad civil nacional e internacional sean destinados a alguien en particular o a una comunidad o municipio autónomo preciso. La Junta de Buen Gobierno decidirá, después de evaluar la situación de las comunidades, adónde es más necesario que ese apoyo se dirija. La Junta de Buen Gobierno impone a todos los proyectos el llamado "impuesto hermano" que es de 10 por ciento del monto total de proyecto. Es decir, si una comunidad, municipio o colectivo recibe un apoyo económico para un proyecto, deberá entregar 10 por ciento a la Junta de Buen Gobierno para que ésta lo destine a otra comunidad que no recibe apoyo. El objetivo es equilibrar un poco el desarrollo económico de las comunidades en resistencia. Por cierto, no se aceptarán sobras, limosnas ni la imposición de proyectos”. (Soto, G., *Para entender al EZLN*, [website], 2003, <http://www.otrosmundoschiapas.org/analisis/PARZLN.pdf>, accessed 29 June 2017)

income distribution would be needed initially. Accordingly, the development of the local level is partially dependable on the tax collection which would be raised and applied by the rules of each local government.

The scholarship suggests a stronger economy and efficiency of public services as benefits of a participative democracy, increasing tax revenue, effective allocation of resources and trust in public institutions. Torgler and Schneider (2009) suggested “citizens are more willing to pay taxes when they perceive that their preferences are properly taken into account by public institutions”. Moreover, Tampubolon (2010) wrote that citizens engagement in political matters increases the legitimacy of the law-making and consequently in the citizens’ trust in governmental institutions.

Accordingly, considering the example of Switzerland as a representative democracy with effective citizen participation, wherein the IDH value and the GNI per capita are growing continuously, from 0.831 and 47,638 in 1990, respectively, to 0.939 and 56,364 in 2015⁴⁴. In that example, a stronger economy may also reflect the effective popular participation in political matters. However, critics of participative democracy uses cases such as the Brexit to support arguments against direct participation of citizens in law and decision-making. The referendum to vote Great Britain’s membership in the European Union is a good example on steps to take before promoting direct democratic measures. Similarly, this work could cite several direct democracy failures. For instance, the Proposition 8 in California, a popular initiative of constitutional amendment, which by 52.24% of the votes eliminated rights of same-sex marriage. In both cases, the misinformation was a decisive aspect of the democratic disaster.

Media and Education

In the Western movie ‘The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance’ (1962), the lawyer Ranse Stoddard played by James Stewart was wrongly portrayed by the media as the righteous killer of the criminal Liberty Valance, leveraging his political career. The often-quoted line "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend" expresses the overall the idea of a “necessary lie” and the detachment of the main media to the truth. In

⁴⁴ United Nations Development Programme, ‘Human Development Report 2016’, 2016, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/CHE.pdf, (accessed 20 June 2017)

the cases above mentioned, the misinformation played by the media and the under-support of the educational system on the construction of politicized citizens portrayed the picture of disaster. In the Brexit case, the main media fed the public opinion with one-sided interpretations and distortions, creating the impression that the British sovereignty was endangered by an undemocratic European Union.

As education, the media has an important role in the empowerment of citizens and therefore in the active participation in a democratic political system. However, the main media outlets are based on private interests which often goes against the emancipation of the citizens. In order to have a functioning democracy, citizens must not only be well-informed but also able to think critically. In this sense, the indigenous experience is a lesson to be learnt.

Aware of the importance of media in order to empower the communities, the indigenous peoples in Mexico created alternative media outlets produced by themselves as an alternative to the on-going misrepresentation and distortions in the main media outlets. The ‘Radio Insurgente’, and the other initiatives, promotes indigenous culture, language and political matters in AM, FM and online. It also focuses on the empowerment of indigenous people, providing mainly information regarding human rights, gender equality, political participation as well as national and international media coverage. The community radios survive from donations of private people or civil society organizations only. However, the main support required is to “make it known, spreading our words”, inviting everyone to share the contents of the radios. The local media has the primary goal of *empowering* the people of the communities. For that, the programmes are presented in different languages and are related to relevant topics, e.g. human rights and the political situation in Mexico. Another relevant difference between Western media outlets and indigenous community media is, once again, at the local level.

The communities have its own local media system, as well as access to all others, which undermine critics regarding concentration of media power. Also, the broadcasting focus on relevant topics at the local level makes it interesting and easy to relate. It also focuses on relevant topics from a human rights perspective, being an informative and empowering mechanism. What this work proposes is not a new idea but an idea that must be valued and well-invested: the *community media*. Rennie (2006) analysis showed that “the terms

“participation” and “access” apply to most community media endeavour, meaning that nonprofessional media makers are encouraged to become involved (participation), providing individuals and communities with a platform to express their views (access). Community media is often defined by the parameters within which groups have to work, including organizational structure, production techniques, and programming.” In this sense, community media represents every endeavour of democracy from below, being a mechanism to foster effective participation of citizens by the involvement of citizens and promoting a space to voice their concerns and demands.

Similarly, the educational system also aims at being an emancipatory mechanism to enable citizens to develop critical-thinking. Having said this, the schools in the Zapatistas communities are spaces for exchange in which the principle of ‘teach by learning’ is the motto to be practiced. The curriculum follows the needs of the community, being inclusive, emancipatory, encouraging the freedom of expression and indigenous memory and culture. Also, the education is bilingual (Spanish and Tsotsil), the students and teachers develop the curriculum together and it is a gender-neutral space. The educational system has three levels, the Escuela Primaria Rebelde Autónomas (EPRA), the Escuela Secundária Rebelde Autónoma (ESRA) and the Centro de Español y Lenguas Mayas (CELM) and the goal, according to themselves, is to provide a “dose of reality and awareness” to the students, teachers and society. It is interesting to notice as well that in the indigenous communities, children and teenager are raised with the same sense of responsibility as an adult and, as such, their participation in political matters is not only a community duty but also an obvious consequence of the community organization.

Accordingly, the people generated from this educational system have a strong sense of community and political participation which is also motivated by the participation of teenagers in the local governing council (Juntas de Buen Gobierno). This is the case of Juan, a 16-year-old who, like many other youngsters, participated in the CNI assembly as a delegate, discussing and voting the organization and functioning of the indigenous governing council. Juan is not an exception; he is the rule that exemplifies the political culture the indigenous communities passed through generations.

Therefore, in order to have a truly democratic system - a system with effective participation of citizens - media outlets must be plural, inclusive and diverse. They must

represent every group within a society, provide access to information and means of participation and aim at emancipating and empowering citizens. Besides, the educational system must follow the same rationale. It should emancipate the students and be a space of exchange where students, teachers and society can learn from each other. But specially, schools must be a space that nurtures critical-thinking and encourages everyone to think by themselves. Through media and education, society is able to question the role of public authorities and raise their demands, increasing the participation of citizens. By doing so, mechanisms of direct popular power would be not only effective but also critically used.

The Delegates or Spokesperson

In the Caracoles, the participation of every person in the governing council (Juntas de Buen Gobierno) is based on a rotational system without re-election. The governing council is composed by twelve people⁴⁵ with a mandate of one week each, from Sunday to Sunday. They work in shifts and return to their original municipality after the weekly mandate, repeating the procedure after three or four weeks until the maximum of three years. After that time, the mandate reaches its term and the governing council is replaced by a new set of people. During the first six months of the new government, the former council has the duty to advice the new one.

The elections of the delegates are held in assembly where every person who belongs to the regional community participate in electing the delegates by consensus. The elected delegates are not paid as their work is considered a duty to the community. However, they receive corn and beans from the community as a symbol of gratitude. The governing system might look ineffective from the perspective that one week is a short period for the delegates to become aware of the community matters. Nonetheless, the “rotational system prevents corruption; the revocation of the mandate and the lack of payment avoids the personal enrichment, the bureaucratization and the abuse of power” (Lang, 2015, p. 230)⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ Each governing council is composed by twelve member of the regional community, two from each region part of the council

⁴⁶ “En toda su ineficiencia y complicación, el gobierno autónomo zapatista se proveyó de mecanismos que lo protejan contra varias de las plagas que tradicionalmente envenenan a otras formas de gobierno. El

The general assembly which elects the delegates is composed by every person in the community, including children and youth from 12 years-old onwards. However, only from the age of 16 years-old the participants can formally vote and be elected as a delegate; before such age the participants can only give an opinion, “they have a voice, but cannot vote”.

Moreover, the requirements to be a candidate are not related to previous experience or academic knowledge. Rather, the requirements are to be respectful, respected and share the values of the community. This is based on the premise that technical skills can be developed during the mandate, whereas personal characteristics cannot. Finally, the candidates do not present their own candidature, rather the community itself indicate a candidate, avoiding the need of candidates to campaign over votes.

The intention to elect delegates is to serve the community which is why they are not remunerated. The indigenous peoples understand that is the duty of every member of the community to work for the collective wellbeing, aiming at the collective development, instead of the individual. In this sense, this work proposes a democracy from below practical framework that instead of electing representatives, the local levels should elect delegates, following the indigenous experience. By doing so, issues of corruption, money-driven interests in public office, bureaucratization, professionalization of politics and self-interest mentality would be avoided. Accordingly, another good practice of the indigenous peoples is the rotational system, which enable every region to participate in the decision-making process, avoiding issues of misrepresentation and being an extraordinary way of involving everyone in the politic life.

sistema rotativo previene la corrupción; la revocabilidad de los mandatos; y la no remuneración de los cargos evita el enriquecimiento personal, la burocratización y el abuso de poder. Se previene no solo la profesionalización de la política –el surgimiento del interés material de mantenerse en el cargo–, sino también el peso de intereses personales ligados con el protagonismo que confiere el capital simbólico. Además, existe una Comisión de Vigilancia que antecede a la Junta de Buen Gobierno. Ella controla que todo el dinero recibido realmente llegue a su destino. La Comisión misma no recibe dinero alguno; solo lleva un registro estricto de los montos que recibe la Junta y su finalidad.” (Lang, M., ‘México: Desde abajo todo, desde arriba nada. La autonomía zapatista en Chiapas y la Otra Campaña’ in M. Lang (ed) *¿Cómo transformar? Instituciones y cambio social en América Latina y Europa*, Bogotá, Fundación Rosa Luxemburgo, 2015, p. 219-276)

Furthermore, electing delegates instead of representatives is not merely a terminology change, but a re-adjustment of the power structures itself, meaning that the current use of the word *representation* implies that the power is on someone else's hands, while *delegation* refers to an entrustment that can be revoked at anything since the power itself is in the hand of the ones who assigned it. Coupled with the re-designations, the fact that delegates are not remunerated and participate in a rotational system of governance also collaborate for the improvement and strengthening of the democratic system, by fostering the trust of citizens in democracy, avoiding corruption and increasing the engagement of not only the delegates, who will have a better knowledge of their community, but also of the civil society itself, who will have an active space to participate.

Based on the concepts exposed above of non-remuneration, delegation rather than representation and the rotational system, this paper proposes as another recommendation in order to build an effective democracy from below the change of the power structures by transforming the public officers into *de facto* agents of public will.

Accountability and Recall

When elected, the indigenous spokeswoman, María de Jesús Patricio Martínez and the indigenous national governing council were warned that if they failed to respect the community's will they would be subject to revocation of the mandate. The possibility of revocation or "recall" is also a mechanism of control used by the Juntas de Buen Gobierno. Member's mandate could be revoked if the community feel misrepresented by its Council. Similarly, the Swiss Constitution also has a control mechanism wherein the people can withdraw any constitutional reform they understand as contrary to the collective will through a referendum or propose any amendment they wish, as long as it did not violate international law or human rights law.

As a successful and long-established story, the Swiss case can corroborate the analysis of the last pillar proposed by this work in order to build a guideline in which democracy from below could lean on. The article 138 and the following articles establish that one hundred thousand citizens entitled to vote can propose amendments or revoke constitutional reforms as well as indicate optional and mandatory referendums that should/must be submitted to the vote of the people and/or cantons. The popular initiative

can also be related to almost every law passed by their representatives. These laws can be put to a general vote if popular initiative collect fifty thousand signatures within one hundred days of the publication of the new law.⁴⁷ The interesting aspect of this analysis is that, albeit the Swiss Constitution allows such mechanism of popular initiative, in ninety-six out of hundred cases⁴⁸ no referendum is initiated to reform general laws. According to Bruno Kaufman, President of the Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe, the reason is related to the high level of legitimacy enjoyed by the parliament, meaning that the elected lawmakers are aware that they will be checked by the electorate to deliver accordingly. Mechanisms of direct democracy increase the dialogue between public officers and citizens and could also be means to avoid populism as the electorate are more aware of the policy-making mechanism and its complexities.⁴⁹

As exposed above, albeit the goal is democracy from below - a participative democracy directly exercised by popular power - some sort of “representation” through delegates with specific mandates is required in order to make it viable. In this sense, following the example of the indigenous councils - both nationally and locally - a mechanism of “recall”, is necessary with a strong and defined mechanism of accountability.

In most democratic systems, public officers are not held accountable for their misrepresentation as agents of public power. However, the electoral system is understood as an accountability mechanism in itself, in the sense that “the anticipation of not being reelected in the future leads elected officials not to shirk their obligations to the voters in the present.” (Manin, 1997, p. 43) The concept of accountability herein examined is the *agent-accountability*: the relationship between agent (public officer) and principal (citizens) in which the principal requires from the agent an *account* of the services provided on behalf of the principal, allowing sanction, replacement or “recall” of the agent. (Waldron, 2014, p. 2)

Moreover, twenty-two countries alone have the possibility of “recall” specified in its Constitutions. From these countries, 54.5% do not indicate what are the grounds for

⁴⁷ Swiss Constitution, 1848.

⁴⁸ Initiative and Referendum Institute Europe, *How Direct Democracy Makes Switzerland a Better Place*, [website], 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1435383/How-direct-democracy-makes-Switzerland-a-better-place.html>, (accessed 22 June 2017)

⁴⁹ Christian Schoenenberger, interviewed by Wider Europe, 2016, [website], <http://www.idea.int/news-media/news/direct-democracy-swiss-experience>, (accessed 23 June 2017)

recall; only two (Ethiopia and Nigeria) guarantee such possibility in case of “loss of confidence” while Colombia is the only one to designate the “non-accomplishment of the government program proposed at the beginning of the respective term, or general disaffection of the population with the performance of the authority” as a reason for recall. Albeit constitutional, most countries did not use the mechanism in the past seven years, not due to satisfaction with its representatives but for unfamiliarity or because the procedure to recall public officers are too complicated.⁵⁰

Based on the indigenous experience, the possibility of recall relates not only on fear to lose the mandate but also on the understanding that the people are aware and actively participating in democracy. The proposal herein exposed understands that for a democracy from below to function and effectively respond to popular power, the spokesperson or delegates must be held accountable for every action taken without popular consent. Also, the failure to be the voice of the respective administrative level should be punished with the revocation of the mandate. By doing so, the fear of a watchful society would prevent actions that endangered the popular supremacy. The spokesperson or delegates are nothing but temporary agents of popular power, meaning that for every action taken an *account* must be provided. That way, they are not invested with power, instead they are public agents *acting* in accordance with popular power as an account must be provided for every action taken.

Accountability plays an easy and affordable role at the local level as the communication between civil society and public agents is direct and personal in small units of local power. Furthermore, the ideal would be that every community gathered at least four times a year to discuss and reach agreements regarding the mandate of public agents, their specific chores and the organization and functioning of the community. On the other hand, the public agents should provide regular reports to the community and act strictly within their mandate’s specificity, otherwise they would be held accountable at risk of having the mandate “recalled”.

The last chapter proposes practices that the from-below concept should follow in order to build a concrete framework based on the indigenous experience in Mexico. The aim of

⁵⁰ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, ‘Direct Democracy Database’, [website], 2008, <http://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/direct-democracy>, (accessed 23 June 2017)

the proposal is to foster the community-based mentality and build a civil society with critical-thinking, which would not only promote the empowerment of the citizens but would also gradually promote the shift to the democracy from below wherein the people themselves shares the power and re-creates it on a daily basis.

CONCLUSION

Democracy from below and direct democracy share many similarities. Albeit direct democracy finds a challenge in implementing it in large-scale administrative units, the from-below perspective represents a possibility of promoting another way of thinking based on collective consciousness.

The indigenous experience in Mexico provides a practical way of understanding the concept of democracy from below and puts it into practice. Firstly, it considers the role of the local level in the process of political empowerment of the communities. Dividing large-scale administrative units into small-scale ones improve the popular participation in the decision-making process, enables the people to voice their concerns and demands whilst facilitating the communication between public officials and the community. Not only the decision-making is more democratic, but also the community itself becomes more engaged in the political system. This makes it more difficult for populist endeavour to grow whilst also foster empowerment in the civil society which will now be able to participate in the political process and think critically.

Secondly, a civil society actively participating in the decision-making requires them to have a political consciousness and to think collectively. For that, it is important to have a free, plural, democratic and impartial media system which works not only as a fourth power - informing society about the public sphere - but also empowers civil society by promoting critical-thinking and shared participation in elaborating the media content. Similarly, the education plays an important role in promoting a democracy from below experience. According to the indigenous model, education should be a shared practice, wherein both the students and teachers can “learn by teaching”, sharing every experience and growing together.

In this sense, the indigenous practice, which embraces both the media and the educational system, is based on collective efforts. The media system is community-based, wherein every community has their own community radio and access to all other community radio

stations. The media content relates to human rights-issues - such as gender equality - to national and international news and to indigenous culture. Every person of every community can participate in the creation of the content and it is presented in different indigenous languages and Spanish. Accordingly, the schools are gender-neutral and the curriculum is developed together with the students. The main goal of the schools is to empower the students and the teacher by creating a collective and political consciousness and encouraging the critical-thinking.

Thirdly, a strong and effective accountability mechanism is required. According to the indigenous practice, if a delegate is failing to properly deliver their responsibilities to the community, the community itself can revoke their mandate. The proposal herein exposed understands that for a democracy from below to be functioning and effectively respond to popular power, the spokesperson or delegates must be held accountable for every action taken without popular consent. At the same time, the failure to be the voice of the respective administrative level should be punished with the revocation of the mandate.

Envisioning democracy from below requires a reconceptualization of the purpose of democracy. Democracy and its institutions are not supposed to be an end in itself. They must be singularly an instrument to serve the people, although this can only be achieved if the individual is willing to engage in shaping the community as a whole. In this context, democracy from below arises. The from-below perspective is about creating a new world of possibilities in which the people have the power and are able to participate in the decision-making process by speaking up and being listened. In this sense, the indigenous experience in Mexico provided the means to accomplish concrete goals on the effort of building a democracy from below.

And, yes, another world is definitely possible.

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