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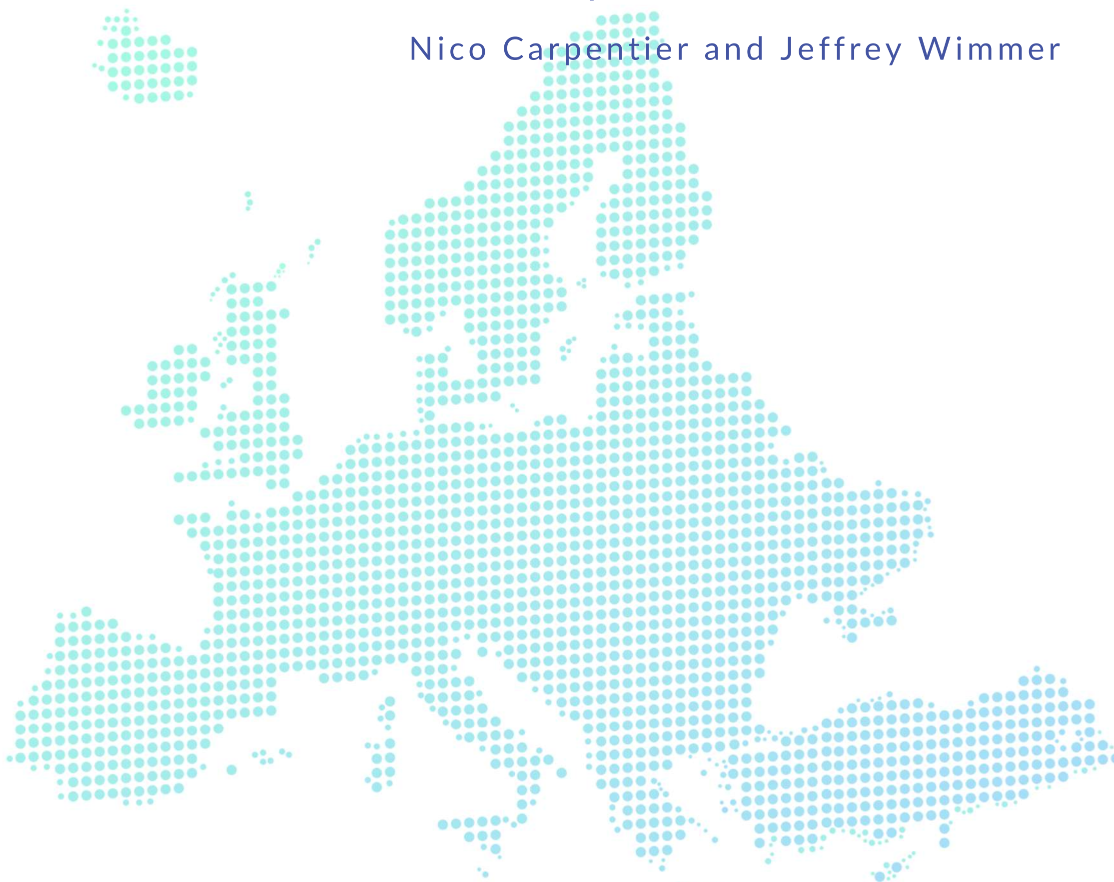
Democracy and Media: A Discursive-Material Approach

Nico Carpentier and Jeffrey Wimmer



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Introduction[1]

Democracy, media and their intersections are topics that have attracted considerable attention over the past decades. The abundance of literature on these three topics even begs the question why another book needs to be written about them. We argue that there a several good reasons to embark on this journey, at this moment in time. One obvious reason is captured by the concept of change: The realms of democracy and media are hardly stable ones. One can—and we will—argue that contingency is a vital structuring element of the social and the political, and that change is thus simply unavoidable, even though one has to prevent falling into the traps of the myopic celebrations of novelty and the neglect of the less visible stabilizations and fixations. But the recent decades have witnessed a series of structural changes of the realms of democracy and media, that in many cases provide reason for concern. The intensity of these changes legitimates taking another cool-headed look at these realms, and to confront the older literature with the more novel analyses that have been produced in response to these changes.

A second reason is that analyses of the intersection of democracy and media is often still semi-monodisciplinary in the relationship with the 'other' academic realms, disregarding whether the analyses find their home in Political Studies or Communication and Media Studies. With this book, we aim to balance the theoretical attention for the realms of democracy and media, which is, for instance, translated into the main structure of this text, and the attention spent on outlining the core determinants of democracy and media, but also the fluidities caused by the political struggles over the articulation of both core concepts.

Finally, a third reason to revisit the theoretical discussions on democracy and media—and their intersections—is that we want to deploy a constructionist perspective to these debates, which is still fairly rare and promisingly innovative. More in particular, we will use a discursive-material approach (see Carpentier, 2017), which allows to pay more attention to the material(ist) dimensions of democracy and media, without neglecting the discursive dimensions. The discursive-material approach that is used in this book builds on Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse-theoretical approach and cross-fertilizes it with new materialist approaches. This results in a discursive-material approach that acknowledges that these discursive and material practices are intensely entangled (or knotted), which implies that they incessantly interact. For instance, societal debates about the (desired) meaning of democracy impact on the materiality of democratic practices, without one of these components becoming necessarily more important than the other. Similarly, the deeply political struggles over what media are, and should be, combine discursive(-ideological) elements with material elements, especially because of the embeddedness of the media landscape in a capitalist economy.

Democracy is thus, in a very Butlerian sense, performed, where discourses give meaning to, and structure, democratic material practices (e.g., going to vote), while these practices also deeply matter, through their ability to confirm and maintain discursive structures, but also

[1] This book uses texts from Carpentier (2007; 2011a; 2021).

through their capacity to dislocate and disrupt our ways of thinking about democracy. Media are a significant part of these dynamics (and many other dynamics), as they, in their multiplicity, are signifying machines that not only allow for the circulation of discourses, but also for the "processes of coordination, synchronization, and harmonization" and have the "capacity for validation, legitimation, and authorization." (Carpentier, 2017: 64) These processes and capacities are also material in nature, structured through hierarchical-formalized and objective-oriented arrangements of people and objects (inside the organization), and inter-organizational networks, organizational environments and widely circulating people and objects (outside the media organization).

Even though we will not elaborate too much on the nuts and bolts of this discursive-material approach—we refer to Carpentier's (2017) *The Discursive-Material* Knot book for this purpose, we do need to point out a few basic ideas. First, its discourse-theoretical starting point moves us away from the more traditional definitions of discourse-as-language, and looks at the interplay of discourses-as-ideology at a societal level. This also distinguishes discourse theory from constructivist approaches that locate discursive production at the individual level. In contrast, in discourse theory, discursive production is seen as a social process, feeding on, but still transcending individual significatory practices. Secondly, discourse theory's deep commitment to the importance of contingency is combined with a fascination for political struggle and the (potentially) resulting stabilizations and fixations. Instead of getting locked into the argument that every universal is a particular, discourse theory's interest lies in understanding how political struggles can lead to a universalization of a particular, combined with the permanent realization that no hegemony is total and eternal, and that resistance is thus not always futile (Carpentier, 2021: 113).

Although Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory frequently emphasized the importance of the material, earlier critiques (see for an overview Carpentier, 2017: 34ff.) make it clear that there is still a need to expand the theoretical reflections on the ways that the discursive and the material are entangled. One metaphor to capture (and label) this entanglement, is the knot, and more in particular, the discursive-material knot. When engaging in this expanding discourse theory project, especially the developments in the field of new materialism—which aims to rethink and revalidate the role of the material in cultural theory—have offered a solid ground, given their emphasis on material agency. This allows us to think of the discursive and the material as entangled—always interwoven, in always specific ways, always ultimately contingent, but also subjected to power struggles that aim to fixate it in always specific ways. This also implies that the core dimension of the discursive and the material intersects with the dimension of structure and agency, but also with the dimension of the cognitive and the affective.

As the particularity and complexity of the discursive-material conceptual framework can be slightly intimidating for readers unfamiliar with it, we have exercised care not to have this academic language too present, but to write in a manner that is sometimes (slightly awkwardly) labelled as 'accessible'. At the same time, the discursive-material approach provided us with a series of sensitizing concepts, that allowed us to construct the theoretical framework elaborated in this book, and thus generated crucial support for the multiple iterations of literature reviews that structured the writing of this book.

The choice of this discursive-material approach also implies a strong sensitivity towards the normative (discursive-ideological) position that any theoretical reflection on democracy and media unavoidably takes, which also applies to this book. Here it is important to mention that this text is positioned inside democracy, which we see as a political project we (need to) support in its very core, even though we also have to remain critical towards its many fallacies, and acknowledge the many political struggles over its articulation and performance. One of the consequences of this position is that we consider processes that would push a society outside democracy as problematic, which is why we label them 'threats'. At the same time, we are also very much aware of the materiality of our position, as members of the MeDeMap consortium—funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe research programme—who committed themselves to producing this book, also to provide theoretical support for the empirical work of our colleagues in the MeDeMap consortium. Moreover, we also need to acknowledge our embeddedness in the materiality of Europe, which structures both the focus of this book and our academic knowledge about democracy and media. Even though we did not shy away from more global approaches, this document is still discursively and materially European.

This book tackles the issues in two main parts. We start with the theoretical discussion on democracy, where we first look at the core defining elements of democracy, without which—arguably—democracy would not exist. As many elements of democracy are contested, we also discuss the five areas of struggle over the articulation of democracy. In a third Section, we discuss what the conditions of possibility of democracy are, without which no democracy would be possible, and—in Section four—the threats to democracy, which captures processes that would push democracy outside democracy. In Part two, we then look at the relationship between media and democracy, first outlining the core defining elements of media (in Section five), the roles that media play in supporting and enhancing democracy (in Section six) and the struggles over democratic media (in Section seven). Again, we then turn our attention to the conditions of possibility of democratic media (in Section eight), and the threats to democratic media (in Section nine). Although processes sometimes find their place in different sections—albeit in always different forms—we believe that this multifaceted approach does justice to the complexities that characterize democracy, media and their intersections.

Part 1: Democracy

1. Core Components of Democracy

Democracy is a contested and deeply ideological notion, that has been defined in a wide variety of ways, even though these different democratic-ideological projects often claim to contain the one and only true or desirable meaning of democracy. Arguably, democracy is an empty signifier (Laclau, 1996: 36) that gains different meanings in different democratic-ideological projects, which engage in fierce discursive-material political struggles over these meanings, trying to establish a hegemonic position and filling the empty seat of the universal meaning democracy through a particular position. Moreover, also the material performances of democracy, with their multitude of always different iterations (see Derrida, 1988; Butler, 1997: 148), intersect with these discursive struggles, impacting on the possible and the desirable.

This perspective also implies that democracy is inherently unstable. To use Enwezor et al.'s (2002) words: Democracy is "unrealized", it is a horizon that is never reached, and that serves a crucial purpose as ideological reference point. But this also means that democracy is caught between projects that want to intensify democracy and expand it throughout different realms of the social, and projects that want to limit and reduce it, or even replace it by a different model of collective problem-solving. The former projects are nicely captured by Giddens (2002: 93) "democratizing democracy" concept, which refers to the increasing the share of decentralized decision-making. The latter projects, for instance, include authoritarian models, that aim to centralize power with a particular actor, and libertarian and anarchist positions that aim to maximize individual freedom and voluntary collaboration, but also to—in practice often overlapping with authoritarianism—models aiming to move beyond politics through the birth of a new (wo)man who cherished communality and cooperation (as, for instance, was theorized by communism).

The impact of both types of projects is also supported by different historical-political analyses, with on the one hand, for instance, Mouffe's (2000) analysis of the democratic revolution, grounded in a *Longue Durée* approach (Braudel, 1969), where she emphasizes the intensification of democratic processes during democracy's existence for more than 200 years. As Mouffe (2000: 1-2) argued, this revolution

> "led to the disappearance of a power that was embodied in the person of the prince and tied to a transcendental authority. A new kind of institution of the social was hereby inaugurated in which power became 'an empty place'."

The latter models, focussing on the disappearance (or reduction) of democracy, also find support in analytical evidence, as is illustrated by Giddens's (2002) –by now even optimistic—paradox, where he observes that while democracy seems to be spreading in the world, mature democracies are experiencing a growing disaffection towards representative democratic processes (see also Raniolo, 2002). One other component of these processes is captured by Agamben's (2003) argumentation that we are living in a (permanent) state of

exception, where civil and human rights are curtailed in the name of security. Yet another component is the rise and mainstreaming of antagonistic xenophobic, racist, and ultra-nationalist ideologies in democratic states, combined with calls for strong leadership, that pave the way for populist and authoritarian regimes, for the legitimation of corruption and other forms of unethical behaviour, and for the politics of fear (see, e.g., Wodak, 2015).

These arguments about the fluidity and boundedness of democracy should not lead us into the trap that the democracy signifier can have any meaning, or can refer to anything. Democracy, as a concept, still has a set of meanings that are part of its significatory history, and that stabilize its meaning. Arguably, this implies that there is still a core set of elements that fixate the meaning of democracy. Even though, theoretically, also this core can change (e.g., over time), it has proven to be remarkably stable.

One starting point is Held's (1996: 1) definition of democracy as "a form of government in which, in contradiction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule. Democracy entails a political community in which there is some form of political equality among the people." In his *Models of Democracy*, Held (1996: 3) initiates the debate by referring to Lively's (1975: 30) list of ways to organize this form of political equality in practice. Lively distinguished seven variations:

> (1) all should govern;
> (2) all should be involved in crucial decision-making;
> (3) rulers should be accountable to the ruled;
> (4) rulers should be accountable to the representatives of the ruled;
> (5) rulers should be chosen by the ruled;
> (6) rulers should be chosen by the representatives of the ruled and
> (7) rulers should act in the interest of the ruled.

Lively's list (and Held's definition) allows highlighting the strong emphasis in democratic theory on the difference between rulers and ruled, but it also—and immediately—produces the necessary condition of the co-presence of representation (or the delegation of power) and participation (or the sharing of power).[2] This always-present balance between representation and participation, for instance, provides structuring support for Held's (1996) typology of democratic models. As Held describes it:

> "Within the history of the clash of positions lies the struggle to determine whether democracy will mean some kind of popular power (a form of life in which citizens are engaged in *self*-government and *self*-regulation) or an aid to decision-making (a means to legitimate the decisions of those voted into power)." (Held, 1996: 3—emphasis in original)

Political representation is grounded in the formal delegation of power, where specific actors are authorized on behalf of others "to sign on his [sic] behalf, to act on his behalf, to speak on his behalf" and where these actors receive "the power of a proxy." (Bourdieu, 1991: 203)

[2] This partially overlaps with Kelsen's (2013: 27) argument on the significance of freedom and equality in the definition of democracy: "political ideology insists upon combining freedom and equality, and precisely the synthesis of both principles is characteristic of democracy."

Obviously, one of the basic democratic instruments for the formal delegation of power is elections, where, through the organization of a popular vote, political actors are legitimized to gain (at least partial) control over well-defined parts of the state's resources and decision-making structures. This control is not total, but structured through institutional, legal (often constitutional) and cultural logics.

On the other side of the democratic balance is the notion of political participation, which refers to the involvement of the citizenry within (institutionalized) politics. As Marshall (1992: 10–11) explained in his discussion of political citizen rights, this not only includes the right to elect, but also the right to stand for election: "By the political element [of citizenship] I mean the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political power or as an elector of such a body." Again, these forms of political participation are not total, but structured through institutional, legal and cultural logics (see Dahlgren, 2009). One important example is the limits imposed by the concept of citizenship itself, which is not only a democracy-facilitating concept, but also has an exclusionary component.

Even though the exact balance between representation and participation can be placed in many different ways, contemporary Western democracies tend to privilege representational democracy, or the government by the "representatives of the people and not by the people themselves", with these representatives selected through elections (Mezey, 2008: 2). Mezey (2008: 2) reminded us that "in popular discourse terms such as republic, democracy, and representative democracy are used interchangeably, in fact they mean quite different things." Representative democracy (or indirect democracy) is often juxtaposed to direct democracy, but in practice, elements of direct democracy—for instance, referendums, citizen agenda initiatives and recall processes (Mezey, 2008: 182), to name but a few—have often been integrated into representative democracy. Still, representative democracy, with the parliament as its icon, remains a hegemonic component of contemporary Western democracies.

A second necessary component of democracy's definition is the presence of a political community. If we return to Lively's (1975: 30) list, with its emphasis on rulers and ruled, we already find a first indication of the central role of the political community. Bass (2005: 638) formulated this significance more explicitly: "The foundational essence of democracy consists of a political community in which there is some form of political equality among its members." Even though political communities are constructed—see Anderson's (2006: 6) concept of the imagined communities, which are "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"— these communities demarcate and discipline the frontiers of democratic practice, articulating who the ruled are, and who their rulers can be.

One of the key discussions about the role of the political community is the link between this political community and the state, in a democratic context. Linz and Stepan (1996: 17) took a clear position in this debate, when they wrote: "Democracy is a form of governance of a modern state. Thus, without a state, no modern democracy is possible." Even though this position has been contested—also because it tends to reduce democracy to its narrower version, which sees democracy as 'mere' politics (see below)—this discussion again demonstrates the importance of the political community in defining democracy. Elkins and

Sides (cited in Møller and Skaaning, 2011: 88), using a statist discourse, formulated this argument as follows:

> "The issue is one of consent. While democracy requires that citizens accept the legitimacy of the elected leaders and rules that put them there, it also requires, more fundamentally, that citizens respect the prerogatives and boundaries of the state that these leaders govern."

Moreover, Linz and Stepan's work, in their focus on stateness, added an important component, which is again about the delimitation of the state (and of the political community). Linz and Stepan here referred to Dahl's (1989: 207—emphasis removed) analysis:

> "The criteria of the democratic process presuppose the rightfulness of the unit itself. If the unit itself is not proper or rightful—if its scope or domain is not justifiable—then it cannot be made rightful simply by democratic procedures."

This statement not only refers to the legitimacy of the political community, but also (as we shall see later) to the inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms of citizenship itself. Here the question becomes: "Who defines citizenship, and how?" (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 28) The answer Linz and Stepan (1996: 28) provided again emphasizes the role of the state:

> "there can be no complex modern democracy without voting, no voting without citizenship, and no official membership in the community of citizens without a state to certify membership."

The last necessary component of democracy's definition is, similarly to stateness, debated as well. Over time, in most Western contexts, democracy has been articulated with liberalism, constituting what is called liberal democracy. At least some elements of liberal democracy have been hegemonized so strongly, that they now have become part of the core defining elements of democracy itself. More specifically, as Bass (2005: 638) writes: "Only when democratic principles were combined with liberalism were civil rights first considered to be essential to democracy." In more elaborate versions, these citizen rights include political rights (as already mentioned above), but also civic rights and social rights (see, again Marshall, 1992). In his work on polyarchy, Dahl (1971: 2) formulates three main conditions:

> "citizens must have unimpaired opportunities: 1. To formulate their preferences; 2. To signify their preferences to their fellow citizens and the government by individual and collective action; 3. To have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of the government, that is, weighted with no discrimination because of the content or source of the preference."

These three conditions are then connected to a series of institutional guarantees, which are:

> "1. Freedom to form and join organizations
> 2. Freedom of expression

3. Right to vote
4. Eligibility for public office
5. Right of political leaders to compete for support
5a. Right of political leaders to compete for votes
6. Alternative sources of information
7. Free and fair elections
8. Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference" (Dahl, 1971: 3)

A less formal interpretation of this list allows us to emphasize the importance of the organized citizenry, or civil society, as, for instance, Putnam (1993) has argued. The structures of civil society allow citizens to meet and discuss, but also to mobilize, and to become acquainted with the complexities of organizational decision-making. A more formal interpretation of the list brings us to another key element, which is the rule of law. In Bass's definition of liberal democracy, the rule of law features prominently. For Bass (2005: 637), liberal democracy is "A political system marked not only by free and fair elections, but also by the rule of law and the protection of basic civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, assembly, and religion." The rule of law, or the idea that all citizens and institutions, including rulers, are accountable to the same laws (see Ten, 2009), has become—through the hegemonization of (parts of) liberal democracy—a key defining characteristic of democracy, together with the presence of more specific citizen (political) rights.

2. Struggles over Democracy

As was already argued in the previous Section, the (meaning of the) concept of democracy is object of a series of political struggles, that aim to dislocate, disrupt or replace democracy. Sometimes these struggles also aim to re-articulate democracy. While the projects of this first type are counter-democratic, rejecting the political practice of democracy as a whole—by rejecting its core defining elements (as described above, in Section one), projects of the second type accept the basic principles of democracy, but defend particular forms of democratic practice.

The first type is, in itself, quite diverse, clustering together authoritarian, libertarian, anarchist and communist positions (amongst others). For instance, libertarian ideology sees the collective decision-making of democracy (and the often-privileged role of the state) as a threat to individual freedoms and to the ability to engage in voluntary social relations, while simultaneously aiming to preserve (and intensify) capitalist economic relations (for an example, see Karsten and Beckman, 2012).[3] Authoritarian positions, in contrast, with their focus on strong leadership, aim to remove the participatory component from democracy. Finally, also some democratic reform projects are still close to these counter-democratic positions, as they contest one or more core elements of democracy. One example is Brennan's (2016) quite recent defence of epistocracy, which can be seen as a (slightly more complex) form of noocracy, or the rule by wise people. As our analysis is still grounded in an acceptance (and appreciation) of democracy, these more fundamental contestations will be articulated as threats to democracy, and discussed later (in Section three).

[3] The last argument differentiates these projects from anarchist models (see, e.g., Honeywell, 2021).

The second type, with its contestations *within* democracy, is more relevant here, as these contestations are an intrinsic part of the democratic process itself. Drawing this frontier is not always easy, but can be considered part of the democratic process itself, as, for instance, Mouffe (2005: 14) indicated: "What democracy requires is drawing the we/they distinction in a way which is compatible with the recognition of the pluralism which is constitutive of modern democracy." Building on this paradox is Mouffe's argument that conflict is an intrinsic part of democracy, also when it concerns the articulation of democracy itself, limited by the unacceptability of violence. In *On the Political*, Mouffe (2005) approvingly cited Canetti (1960: 222) who wrote that democracy is the "renunciation of death as an instrument of decision." Within the frontiers constituted by the very core of democracy, "necessary for maintaining popular rule over time" (Gutmann, 2007: 528), there is still ample space for internal contestation, which will be discussed in this Section.

Before mapping the most important areas of political struggle over democracy, it is important to return to the intrinsic interwovenness of the discourse of democracy and its material practices. The following discussion of democratic struggles over democracy thus needs to be read as an analysis of entangled discursive-material democratic practices, always susceptible to change, but also subjected to hegemonizing forces that aim to fixate this contingency.

2.1. The Balance between Participation and Representation

One of the core struggles in democratic history is focussed on the balance between representation and participation. When the political is defined, for instance, following Schumpeter (1976), as the privilege of specific competing elites, thus reducing the political role of the citizenry to participation in the election process, the balance shifts towards representation and the delegation of power. In contrast, in other democratic models (e.g., participatory-democratic models – see below), participation plays a more substantial and continuous role. Here, participation does not remain restricted to the 'mere' election of representatives. These democratic models are characterized by more decentralized societal decision-making. Carpentier (2011a) refers in this context to the minimalist versus maximalist dimension of democratic participation, where representation and participation are always present, but can have different weights, as is visualized in Figure One.

Figure One: The minimalist versus maximalist dimension of democratic participation

Minimalist democratic participation	*Maximalist democratic participation*
Focusing on representation and delegation of power	Balancing representation and participation
Participation limited to elite selection	Attempting to maximize participation
Focusing on macro-participation	Combining macro- and micro-participation
Narrow definition of politics as institutionalized politics	Broad definition of the political as a dimension of the social
Unidirectional participation	Multidirectional participation
Focusing on a homogeneous popular will	Focusing on heterogeneity

Source: Carpentier, 2011a: 17

One of the academic fields where these discussions are rendered explicit, is democratic theory (see Held, 1996, for an overview). When focussing on maximalist democratic participation, there are a number of examples that show the workings of this political struggle over the balance between representation and participation, as they propose to reform representative democracy, in order to increase and even maximize the participatory component of democracy. For instance, Marxist theory takes a strong emancipatory position, that is embedded in a critique of the bourgeois domination of society. In particular Marxism's transitional stage, with the emphasis on delegative democracy, demonstrates the interest in (first) reforming democracy, and establishing what Marx called the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. The Commune of Paris functioned as an example, as it was formed by municipal councillors,

> "chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time." (Marx, 1993: 57)

A (relatively) more recent example are the New Left conceptualizations of participatory democracy – developed by Pateman (1970; 1985) and Macpherson (1966; 1973; 1977) and later by Mansbridge (1980) and Barber (1984), who focus on the combination of the principles and practices of direct and representative democracy. The problems of coordination in large-scale industrial societies brings these authors to accept representation (and power delegation) as a necessary tool at the level of national decision-making, but at the same time Pateman (1970: 1) critiques authors such as Schumpeter (1976) for attributing "the most minimal role" to participation, and for basing their arguments on a fear that the implementation of more extensive forms of participation might jeopardize society's stability. It is only through participation in these 'alternative areas' of the political that a citizen can "hope to have any real control over the course of his [sic] life or the development of the environment in which he lives." (Pateman, 1970: 110)

In contrast, Schumpeter's (1976) model of competitive-elitist democracy is an example of the minimalist participatory approach to democracy. In the 1940s, Schumpeter (1976: 269) defined democracy as an "institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote." Competitive-elitist democracy places a strong emphasis on political leadership, and—as the name of the model indicates—sees the competition between political elites as a safeguard against the excesses of political leadership, while simultaneously handling the (perceived) problem of an electorate which is considered to be poorly informed or too emotional.

2.2. The Reach of Democracy: Politics Versus the Political

A second contestation is related to the reach of democracy. The issue is whether democracy is confined to the realm of institutionalized politics, or whether democracy functions in all realms of the social. One way this distinction has been captured is through the notions of politics and the political. Mouffe, for instance, described this distinction as follows:

> "By 'the political,' I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations. 'Politics' on the other side, indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'." (Mouffe, 2000: 101, see also Mouffe, 2005: 8)

In other words, according to Mouffe (1993a: 3), the political "cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific sphere or level of society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition." This formulation of Mouffe's distinction confusingly diverges from a series of (structurally similar) arguments that maintain the usage of the signifier 'politics', while broadening its meaning (see, in this context, for instance Beck's (1997) concept of sub-politics, Giddens's (1991) concept of life politics and cultural studies' use of the politics concept (see e.g. Hall, 1997: 257)). Despite these differences we find in these intellectual projects the tendency to broaden the concept of politics (and the political) beyond the confinements of institutionalized politics, which also allows for the broadening of democracy beyond this particular realm.

These attempts to broaden democracy's reach (and the resistances they provoke) are connected to issues of scale, and captured by the distinction that Thomas (1994) made between micro- and macro-participation. While macro-participation relates to participation in the entire polis, country or political community, micro-participation refers to the spheres of school, family, workplace, church and community. The positions that defend a narrower definition of democracy then become translated in approaches to participation that centralize institutionalized politics. For instance, a classic definition of political participation, by Verba and Nie (1987: 2), stated that political participation is "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take", which mostly situates political participation within the field of macro-participation. Brady (1997: 737) used a slightly broader definition of political participation as "any activity of ordinary citizens with the aim of influencing the political outcomes", but on the next page added that these participatory efforts are "directed at some government policy or activity." (Brady, 1997: 738) More traditional public sphere models also tend to focus on macro-communicative processes, in the establishment of 'the' public opinion. This is a viewpoint echoed in Habermas's (1974: 49) old definition of the public sphere: "By the 'public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens."

In contrast, positions that defend a broader approach to democracy argue against the idea that citizen involvement is restricted to institutionalized politics. Democratic (participatory) practices can also be embedded within the structures of everyday life (which can, for instance, be located in civil society, businesses or families). One example is *The Transformation of Intimacy*, where Giddens (1992: 182) formulates a warm plea for the "radical democratisation of the personal" on the basis of the argument that a symmetry

exists between “the democratising of personal life and democratic possibilities in the global political order at the most extensive level.” (Giddens, 1992: 195–196) A similar argumentation was used by Hartmann et al. (2007) when developing the notion of democratic familyship.

Another example of a project to broaden the reach of democracy is Pateman’s (1970) work. Although she accepted the importance of representative democracies, she combined this with attention for participatory processes in other societal spheres, such as the workplace:

> “Apart from its importance as an educative device, participation in the workplace – a political system – can be regarded as political participation in its own right. Thus industry and other spheres provide alternative areas where the individual can participate in decision making in matters of which he [or she] has first hand, everyday experience.” (Pateman, 1970: 35)

2.3. The Reach of Democracy 2: Procedural versus Substantive Democracy

A second struggle over the reach of democracy relates to the difference between procedural and substantive democracy, or between “rule-centered and outcome-centered conceptions of democracy.” (Shapiro, 1996: 123) In the case of procedural democracy, sometimes also called proceduralist democracy or proceduralism, an outcome is “[…] acceptable as long as the relevant procedure generates it.” Bobbio’s (1987: 24—emphasis in original) definition of democracy is illustrative for this approach, when he writes that democracy is “characterized by a set of rules (primary or basic) which establish *who* is authorised to take collective decisions and which *procedures* are to be applied.”

Saffon and Urbinati (2013: 442) made the link of procedural democracy with elections particularly explicit, when they wrote that the proceduralist view

> “posits that the modern democratic procedure—based on every individual’s equal participation in fair and competitive elections for selecting political representatives and thereby contributing to the production of decisions via majority rule—is the best way of respecting equal liberty in a context of pluralism and dissent.”

The emphasis on equal liberty has been part of the procedural democracy tradition for a considerable time, with, for instance, Kelsen (2013: 97)–writing in the 1920s—defending formal equality as part of political participation, but also rejecting any substantive interpretation of equality:

> “Insofar as the idea of equality is meant to connote anything other than formal equality with regard to freedom (i.e., political participation), that idea has nothing to do with democracy. This can be seen most clearly in the fact that not the political and formal, but the material and economic equality of all can be realized just as well—if not better—in an autocratic-dictatorial form of state as it can in a democratic form of state.”

Kelsen (2013: 32) made a similar argument against the articulation of liberalism with democracy:

> "The meaning of freedom has changed from the idea that the individual should be free from state rule to the idea that he should be able to participate in that rule. This transformation simultaneously requires that we detach democracy from liberalism. Since the demand for democracy is satisfied insofar as those subject to the order participate in its creation, the democratic ideal becomes independent of the extent to which that order seizes upon them and interferes with their 'freedom'."

In the substantive democracy approach, as mentioned before, the notion of outcome becomes centralized. In this approach, a "[…] [re]distributive outcome or state of affairs (equality, lack of certain types or degrees of inequality, or some other) […]" (Shapiro, 1996: 123) is defined, which is then used to evaluate the results of the decision rules.[4] Also the substantive democracy approach has a long tradition, with, for instance, Pitkin (1967) arguing that the concept of (political) representation generates a series of requirements, including a sensitivity to the interests of those represented (which is an outcome-centred component, and not a procedural one). She formulated this as follows:

> "representing here means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them […] And, despite the resulting potential for conflict between representative and represented about what is to be done, that conflict must not normally take place. The representative must act in such a way that there is no conflict, or if it occurs an explanation is called for." (Pitkin, 1967: 209)

More recently, Fetrati (2023) provided a detailed description of the different outcomes that become articulated with democracy in this approach, distinguishing participatory, deliberative and egalitarian dimensions. For Fetrati (2023: 379), substantive democracy is:

> "participatory when strong political institutions—along with a robust civil society—allow ordinary citizens to have direct leverage within the decision-making process. […]
> deliberative when political representatives continually explain their decisions in a way that is comprehensible to everybody. […]
> egalitarian when all citizens have equal access to adequate economic, legal, and political resources to engage in the policy process and no group faces prohibitive barriers."

The latter component will also be addressed in the next Section, but it is important to already stress here that what Fetrati calls the egalitarian dimension of substantive democracy also opens up opportunities to argue for the importance of the existence of a democratic culture, supported by, for instance, the respect for human rights. As Doomen (2016: 279) argued: "Democracy is associated with certain (human) rights […] a moral

[4] Talisse (2013: 142) argued that the democratic models that are described in our document as maximalist participatory models also lean towards substantive democracy (see also Figure One).

conception of democracy." This returns us to the discussion on the frontiers of democracy, as a purely proceduralist approach to democracy might be used to end democracy, or to violate the rights of a minority, which resonates with Popper's (1947) paradox of tolerance. Doomen (2016) used the term of mitigated democracy here, to conceptualize the limits imposed by these frontiers.[5] He explained this with the following example, adding that liberal democracy may *mitigate* this problem by guaranteeing particular rights:

> "Suppose that a minority would practice a religion in such a way that it would conflict with the prevalent ethical conception. For example, that conception may bring with it that an obligatory vaccination policy exists; the freedom of a citizen who does not want to have his children inoculated for religious reasons (supposing the religious duty is thus interpreted) would be limited if they would be inoculated against his wishes. [...] This means that exercising such rights is possible only if democracy is mitigated and not if it is fully realized; exercising them would (obviously not in all cases but certainly in some) evidence a conflict with democracy. It is important to observe here that such a conflict is only apparent if a conception of substantive democracy is used; in the case of formal democracy, no a priori restrictions exist, since any outcome is compatible with that conception of democracy." (Doomen, 2016: 282-283)

2.4. Defining the Political Community: Group-Differentiated Rights, and Individualistic Versus Communal Democracy

A fourth area of political contestation in relation to democracy focusses on the definition (and delimitation) of the political community. The frontier that is drawn between members of the political community who are allowed to participate in the political process, and those who are excluded from this participation is also a political decision, and thus object of contestation. Given the strong articulation of democracy with stateness (see Linz and Stepan, 1996), citizenship becomes a crucial mechanism for inclusion or exclusion, even though it is not the only one, as the broad approach to politics (captured by the concept of the political, see above) allows defining other social entities, such as the family, the pupils at a school, the students at a university or polytechnic, or the employees at a workplace, also as political communities, which have their own (contested) inclusions and exclusions.

Still, citizenship has become one of the key locations of the struggles over (legitimate) membership of political communities, intimately connected with the acknowledgement (or not) of (cultural) diversity, multiculturality and migrant rights. In other words, the different subcommunities of a political community may be considered vital components of democracy. Bass (2005: 639) summarized these debates within liberal democracy as follows:

> "Liberal democratic theorists since World War II have traditionally tended to argue that democratic freedom and equality can best be ensured through the provision of individual political rights and civil liberties. But recently some theorists have resurrected a tradition of liberal democratic thought that argues that for freedom

[5] When referring to democracy, Doomen (2016) used a procedural definition.

> and equality to prosper in multinational (or even multicultural) societies, it is necessary to also require some group-differentiated or minority rights."

One example for the argumentation for group-differentiated (or minority) rights is Kymlicka's (1995: 2) *Multicultural Citizenship*, who sets the scene in the following terms:

> "Some minorities were physically eliminated, either by mass expulsion (what we now call 'ethnic cleansing') or by genocide. Other minorities were coercively assimilated, forced to adopt the language, religion, and customs of the majority. In yet other cases, minorities were treated as resident aliens, subjected to physical segregation and economic discrimination, and denied political rights."

This approach, to "supplement traditional human rights principles with a theory of minority rights" (Kymlicka, 1995: 5), while avoiding the risks of generating new exclusions and segregations that violate human rights (Kymlicka, 1995: 6) and the threats to social unity (Kymlicka, 1995: 192), is defended as a model to better "address the needs and aspirations of ethnic and national minorities." (Kymlicka, 1995: 195)

This conflict over the nature of the political community also finds its translation in the debates about what Elazar (1993) called individualistic and communal democracy. Individualistic democracy—which Elazar (1993: 13) equated to liberal democracy—sees "the individual standing naked in the world until he or she binds with other individuals to establish civil society and government." This type of democracy aligns with what Hendriks (2011) called aggregative democracy, where individual preferences are registered and aggregated, which in turn is associated to majoritanist democracy. Bass (2005: 637) described the latter form of democracy as "A form of democracy in which political power tends to be centralized and concentrated so as to reflect the will of the majority, or even a bare plurality."

In contrast, communal democracy moves away from the dominant individualistic models of democracy, and acknowledges the political relevance of different subcommunities in the political community. Or, in Elazar's (1993: 16) words: "The theory of communal democracy gives the community a political status in its own right." In (an extended version of) communal democracy, we can argue that there are many different types of communities, for instance ethnic, linguistic or religious communities, but also, for instance, corporations, with the latter bringing in corporatist models (see, e.g., McRae, 1979). Particularly the democratic practices in, and research on, so-called 'divided societies' produces a diversity of communal democratic models, including consociational democracy (Lijphart, 1969), integrative democracy (Horowitz, 1985) or centripetalism, and communalism (Reilly, 2011).[6] Also federalism can be seen as a formal translation of the model of communal democracy.

If we focus, for convenience's sake, on one of these models, namely consociational democracy, we can show the workings of communal democracy, and its political struggle with individualistic democracy. After all, as Lijphart (1969: 214) wrote: "Consociational

[6] These different models are not always inseparable. Bogaards (2019), for instance, pointed to the overlapping nature of centripetal and consociational democracies. Also some definitions of consensus democracy (e.g., Bass, 2005: 637) are broad enough to also include consociational democracy.

democracy violates the principle of majority rule." Older definitions of consociational democracy, such as Lijphart's (1969: 216), focus on "government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy", but this was soon expanded through the generation of the four 'classic' principles of consociationalism, which are:

> "(1) government by grand coalition, (2) mutual veto on the part of the coexisting groups, (3) proportionality as the principal standard of political representation, civil service appointment, and allocation of public resources, and (4) a high degree of segmental autonomy in those areas where joint decision making is not needed." (Taylor, 2009: 123, see also Lijphart, 1977: 25–44, and Bogaards, et al., 2019: 346)

Consociationalist models have, in many cases, failed in their implementation or survival, with Belgium and Switzerland considered to be the classic and still ongoing cases (Taylor, 2009: 6). Lemarchand (2006: 2) argued that in particular Africa "has become a graveyard of consociational experiments", but also the case of the Republic of Cyprus can be mentioned here, as consociationalism lasted on this island for exactly three years (Lijphart, 1969: 216; Taylor, 2009: 6). In the Cypriot case, the majoritanist articulation of democracy that Greek Cypriots were using led to a "[…] theorisation of Turkish-Cypriots *not* as a political representational group but as a 'minority' […]" (Anthias and Ayres, 1983: 69—emphasis in original), which resulted in the violent collapse of Cypriot consociational democracy in 1963. These histories show the strength of majoritanist articulations of democracy, but also remind us of the existence and intensity of political struggles over the definition of the political community.

2.5. The Struggle over Procedures: Majoritarian Democracy versus Consensus Democracy, and the Shift Beyond Elections

The last conflict *within* democracy over democracy is focussed on the nature of the democratic procedures. How the 'rule of the people' is exactly organized can vary in numerous ways, and is, in itself, object of political struggle. If we look at current forms of democratic organization, for instance, through Lijphart's (2012) study of 36 countries, this multitude of organizational models becomes apparent. Lijphart (2012), for instance, distinguishes between two-party and multi-party models, single chamber and multi-chamber parliamentary models, different electoral systems, different models to organize the executive power and the relations between the legislative and executive powers, different positions of the judicial system and the constitution, different positions of interest groups, and different positions of central banks.

At the same time, Lijphart (2012) argues that this multiplicity is structured through the majoritarian versus consensus democracy dimension. He introduces this distinction through the fundamental question: "Who will do the governing and to whose interests should the government be responsive when the people are in disagreement and have divergent preferences?" (Lijphart, 2012: 2), which has two answers. The answer "the majority of the people" leads to majoritarian democracy, while the answer "as many people as possible" leads to consensus democracy. There are a few important additions to make here. First,

both models—as defined by Lijphart—focus on the formal organization of democratic structures. Second, consensus democracy, as Lijphart (2012: 2—emphasis in original) wrote, "does not differ from the majoritarian model in accepting that majority rule is better than minority rule, but it accepts majority rule only as a *minimum* requirement: instead of being satisfied with narrow decision-making majorities, it seeks to maximize the size of these majorities." But again, whether majoritarian or consensus democracy is used, is object of political struggle, keeping in mind that majoritarianism

> "is simple and straightforward and has great appeal because government by the majority and in accordance with the majority's wishes obviously comes closer to the democratic ideal of 'government by and for the people' than government by and responsive to a minority." (Lijphart, 2012: 2)

The political struggles over the formal organization of democracy are not limited to the current diversity of democratic practices. Some perspectives on formal democracy and its procedures propose alternative (or even counter-hegemonic) practices, that present novel democratic procedures, or that aim to revalidate older procedures that have fallen in disuse. One example here is Van Reybrouck's (2016) *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy*, where he—building on the earlier work of Bouricius (2013)—passionately defends sortition as an alternative to election, or as a democratic practice that can be combined with election. Returning to the Athenian democracy, but also pointing to the current practices of people's jury in the criminal justice system—and one can also add advisory citizen parliaments to this list—Van Reybrouck (and Bouricius) defended multi-body sortition, also as a (partial) solution for "the systemic crisis of democracy", which

> "can be remedied by giving sortition a fresh chance. The drawing of lots is not a miracle cure, not a perfect recipe, any more than elections ever were, but it can correct a number of the faults in the current system. Drawing lots is not irrational, it is arational, a consciously neutral procedure whereby political opportunities can be distributed fairly and discord avoided. The risk of corruption reduces, election fever abates and attention to the common good increases. Citizens chosen by lot may not have the expertise of professional politicians, but they add something vital to the process: freedom. After all, they don't need to be elected or re-elected." (Van Reybrouck, 2016: 151-152)

3. Conditions of Possibility of Democracy

Democracy, as a discursive-material assemblage is enabled by a series of processes that are located outside democracy itself, and that are conducive towards its existence. Some of these conditions of possibility—sometimes also called preconditions—are located at a more discursive level, while others are more material (even though we see these two elements as always entangled). Moreover, many of these conditions combine affective and cognitive dimensions. In this Section, we will enumerate a series of these conditions of possibility.

3.1. Material Decentralizations and Stabilities

In the historical literature on the formation of modern democracy, one of the arguments is that democracy was enabled by changing material class structures, with, for instance, the monarchy or the aristocracy sufficiently weakened, or the inability of the creation of a strong aristocratic-bourgeois coalition. One example is Moore's (1973: 437) analysis,[7] who, for instance, wrote that "a commercial and industrial class which is too weak and dependent" may throw "itself into the arms of the landed aristocracy and the royal bureaucracy, exchanging the right to rule for the right to make money. […] Where the coalition succeeds in establishing itself, there has followed a prolonged period of conservative and even authoritarian government […]." In this type of argument, democracy requires the absence of structural power imbalances between classes or societal groups, and the absence of fundamental imbalances in the distribution of capital, as this disrupts the very basis on which democracy rests, namely (a degree of) structural equality.

If we go back further in time, we can also identify a second type of argument related to material conditions, adding the element of time to the equation. For instance, when analysing Athenian democracy, Held (1996: 23-24) pointed to the deeply problematic—from a contemporary perspective—material conditions that enabled that particular form of democracy, namely the existence of a slave economy that allowed the Athenian citizens to invest in political decision-making, where "Athenian slavery and democracy seem to have been indivisible." Or, in other words: "The legendary democracy was intimately connected to what one might call the 'tyranny of citizens'." (Held, 1996: 24) Secondly, also the dislocations that disrupted Athenian democracy, and which were (at least to a high degree) caused by elements external to the democratic process, point to the importance of stability. One of many examples here is the defeat of Athens that was inflicted by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), which resulted in the establishment of a group of pro-Spartan oligarchs in Athens, known as the Thirty Tyrants.

These arguments about material stability also connect to another period in time, namely the rise of fascism and Nazism in 20th century Europe and the collapse of several democratic regimes (see, for instance, Berman, 2021). They also resonate with more contemporary analyses about the role of— what, for instance, Turner (2022) calls—catastrophes, in the weakening and destabilizing democracy. In particular, Turner (2022: 8) refers to a "general political and social crisis" and to "multiple difficulties" which "have been important in the rise of right-wing populism, and the further destabilization of democratic institutions."

3.2. The State and its Legitimacy

A second condition of possibility is connected to the presence of core actors in the democratic process, as part of the political community. As we argued before, in contemporary democratic practice—although it is not a theoretical necessity—the state has become the structure in which and through which democracy is organized. The state is, as

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[7] Even though there are critiques on the broad-sweeping nature of these kinds of analysis, see, for instance, Femia (1972).

Gupta (1995: 392) wrote, “a cohesive and unitary whole”, with boundaries that are “defined by all those actions more or less directly related to the making of binding decisions for society” (Easton, 1957: 385); but the state is still also a “multi-layered concept that includes a range of ideological, material and judiciary relations.” (Filimonov and Carpentier, 2023: 168, see also Fuchs, 2018: 72) This also implies that the state cannot be equated with democracy, also not in democratic societies.

In particular, neo-pluralist democratic theorists (e.g., Lowi, 1969) have emphasized this point. The neo-pluralist perspective highlights the role of different groups—interest or pressure groups—where the state and its bureaucracies become (only) one of the actors in the power play over political decision-making. Simultaneously, neo-pluralists argue that the corporate actors have a substantial power base and enjoy a privileged position, which also affects the position of the state. What Offe (1984: 49) called the capitalist state “protects the capital relation from the social conditions it produces without being able to alter the status of this relationship as the dominant relationship.” Or, as Held (1996: 223—emphasis in original) pointed out: “The modern state, therefore, faces contradictory imperatives: it must maintain the accumulation process without undermining either *private* accumulation or the belief in the market as a fair distributor of scarce resources.”

One crucial component then becomes the legitimacy of the state. Earlier, we already referred to Dahl’s (1989: 207—emphasis removed) analysis, which is worth repeating, as it incorporates a clear formulation of legitimacy as condition of possibility: “The criteria of the democratic process presuppose the rightfulness of the unit itself. If the unit itself is not proper or rightful—if its scope or domain is not justifiable—then it cannot be made rightful simply by democratic procedures.” Or, as Ananieva and Rozhkova (2021: 32) wrote: “In the modern world, legitimacy has become a necessary, i.e. required, condition of a well-ordered state regarding its political institutions and their decisions.” There are many different approaches to (political) legitimacy, but in particular Chabot’s (1993: 160) definition is helpful, as legitimacy is articulated here as “the adequacy of the real or perceived qualities of the rulers to the implied or clearly expressed consent of the governed.” Furthermore, Chabot (1993: 160) distinguished four types of legitimacy (democratic, ideological, technocratic and ontological), which—arguably—all overlap when discussing legitimacy as a condition of possibility for the democratic state, and democracy as a whole.

3.3. The People and their Access, Interaction, Engagement, Trust and Knowledge

Of course, the state is not the only relevant actor of the political community, despite its privileged status. Equally important are the discussions about the people as constituent of the political community. Even though there are some very basic material needs that most likely need to be fulfilled as well—e.g., having the primary needs of nutrition, shelter, protection, etc. met—it is, in particular, the conditions of possibility related to participation that become relevant here, as democracy is expected to provide a degree of participation. Wacquant’s summary of Bourdieu’s work—for instance, elaborated in *Pascalian Meditations* (Bourdieu, 1997)—offers a good introduction to this cluster of conditions of possibility, arguing that it is necessary:

> "first to acknowledge that the conditions of access to political expression are not universally granted a priori to all but, on the contrary, that they are socially determined and differentially allocated; and then to work to universalize the ability and the propensity to act and think politically, that is, to universalize realistic means of gaining access to that particular historical embodiment of the universal that is democratic politics." (Wacquant, 2004: 12)

One model that includes two conditions of possibility is the so-called AIP model by Carpentier (2011a; 2011b), where AIP stands for Access, Interaction and Participation. Access refers to presence, for instance, in using media technologies to have one's voice heard, or in particular organizational settings where (co-)decision-making processes are organized. Interaction then refers to the "establishment of socio-communicative relationships" (Carpentier, 2011a: 127), necessary for participatory processes to take place, for instance through the usage of media technologies or with other citizens in (the set-up of) (co-) decision-making processes.

Another body of literature that refers to the conditions of possibility of participation and democracy focusses on the notion of engagement. Wacquant (2004: 3) referred to engagement as the "social state wherein everyone would possess both the inclination and the ability to take matters political into their own hands", while Dahlgren (2013: 25) define engagement as the "subjective disposition that motivates [the] realization [of participation]", in order to distinguish it from participation. Dahlgren and Hill (2023: 5), when discussing media engagement, defined the latter concept as an "energising internal force that propels citizens to participate in society." In earlier work, Dahlgren (2009) argued that the feeling of being invited, committed, and/or empowered and also the positive inclination toward the political (and the social) are crucial components of engagement.

Trust is yet another condition of possibility for democracy that is frequently mentioned. Dahlgren (2013: 24), for instance, wrote that "A minimal level of 'horizontal' trust, that is, between citizens, is necessary for the emergence of the social bonds of cooperation between those who collectively engage in politics; there is an irreducible social dimension to doing politics." But trust also plays a significant role in the relation between citizens and the democratic state—which partially returns us to the discussion on legitimacy—although trust and legitimacy are not the same, as, for instance, Rosanvallon (2008: 3) argues. Here, trust in the democratic institutions is seen as important to the functioning of democracy itself and "Numerous studies have lamented an endemic distrust of politicians, low levels of electoral participation, the decline of political parties, and widespread political apathy or passivity." (Jones in Rosanvallon, 2008: x) Interestingly, though, these discussions on trust have a counter-pendant, as distrust is also seen as an important component in the relation between citizens and the democratic state, as this allows for critical evaluations of the workings of the state and for democratic participation to play its role.

Finally, knowledge and literacy are considered conditions of possibility of participation and democracy. This connects to the importance of rational argumentation and critique, briefly touched upon by Derrida (2002: 29) when discussing the right to philosophy: "there is no democracy in general without [the right to philosophy]." This type of argument also implies

that education, as knowledge acquisition, becomes an important element for democracy. This type of argument we can find with Flores (2014: 113), who wrote: “The lack of education is, as we have already pointed out, one of the obstacles for democracy and a pending matter if we are truly committed to democracy, especially, in the substantive partnership conception.” She continued by arguing for “the participation and representation of all the citizens, including a better and greater education of all the people… men and women, poor and rich, religious and no-religious, old and young.” (Flores, 2014: 114) Also in the field of (media and information) literacy, a similar line of argument can be found, with, for instance, Türkoğlu (2011) arguing that critical media literacy is a precondition of participation and democracy, while Gutiérrez (2019: 47) makes a similar point for data literacy, describing it as “a key condition of possibility for participation, whose absence can impose a formidable barrier.”

3.4. Democratic Culture and its Values

A last set of conditions of possibility are situated more at the discursive dimension, even though they are always performed and practiced as well (bringing in a more material component). There are many values linked to democracy, often grounded in the enlightenment project (see Hasan, 2021), but we will only discuss those values that are conditions of possibility for democracy, which is different from the core defining elements of democracy (discussed earlier).

A first concept is autonomy, which—as a concept—mostly relates to the individual citizen. Here, in particular, anarchist theory offers a good starting point, with, for instance, Wolff (1998: 13) writing that: “Every man [sic] who possesses both free will and reason has an obligation to take responsibility for his actions, even though he may not be actively engaged in a continuing process of reflection, investigation, and deliberation about how he ought to act.” In democracy, autonomy—as Hutchings (1998: 166) stated in relation to civic republic democracy—generates “the natural right of an individual to self-government”, while in liberal democracy, this ground is “the moral law which entrenches the primacy of individual right.” In both scenarios, the concept of the individual autonomous citizen, capable of reason and in possession of a free will, is a necessity. Of course, this does not imply that there are no restrictions on free will and autonomy. Even Wolff (1998: 13)—as mentioned before, writing from an anarchist perspective—added that “The responsible man is not capricious or anarchic, for he does acknowledge himself bound by moral constraints. But he insists that he alone is the judge of those constraints.” Or, in Lipson’s (1995: 2249) words: “A constrained choice or act can be an autonomous one, as long as, and insofar as, the source of the constraints is the person himself.” Arguably, the rule of law (see Section one, and Bass (2005: 637) in particular) does complicate (and can potentially dislocate the autonomy discourse), as citizens subjected to the rule of law—considered vital for liberal democracy—might see their autonomy curtailed beyond their will. At the same time, the concept of autonomy also grounds the rule of law, as the idea of the individual citizen who is responsible for their actions, enables the functioning of penal systems, thus using autonomy to—often but not always temporary—suspend autonomy.

Hutchings’ (1998: 166) discussion of autonomy brings in a second level, equally important for the discussions on the conditions of possibility of democracy, when she wrote that—

again in civic republican democracy[8]—a contract is generated "which constructs an autonomous people", who are also labelled "an exclusive sovereign people." As Kalyvas (2005) analysed in detail, sovereignty is a much-critiqued notion, with many (often-contradictory) layers—caused by, for instance, the distinction between state and popular sovereignty, and more absolutist interpretations, illustrated by Bodin's (1992: 1) definition of sovereignty as "the highest power of command." Here, in this book, sovereignty is seen as articulated with autonomy, to refer to the construction of a political community, deemed legitimately demarcated from other groups or communities. Even though a global political community is thinkable, the articulation of liberal democracy with stateness automatically produces multiple political communities, and thus frontiers (often organized through citizenship, see Section 1). While the nature of these frontiers is deeply political—for instance, in relation to indigenous inclusions (Curry, 2004) or to the degree of permeability of the enclosure or 'corral', as van Reekum and Schinkel (2019) call it—the acknowledgement of the existence of sovereign political communities remains vital and necessary.

Finally, a third necessary concept—as condition of possibility—is the rejection of violence to settle political disputes within the political community. As a starting point of this argumentation, we can expand on the distinction between conflict and violence (and the democratic unacceptability of violence), which we already touched upon when referring to Mouffe's (2005) and Canetti's (1960) work. Helpful here is Wallensteen's (1991: 130) definition of conflict as "[…] subjectively experienced or objectively observable incompatibilities", which is much broader than violence. Still, the threat of violence remains, as Mouffe (2000: 131) argued, writing that "[…] we have to realise that the social order will always be threatened by violence." But still following Mouffe (1993b: 153), we can also argue that democracy is grounded in the transformation of antagonism into agonism: "Instead of shying away from the component of violence and hostility inherent in social relations, the task is to think how to create the conditions under which those aggressive forces can be defused and diverted and a pluralist democratic order made possible." In other words, for democracy to work, it is necessary to "tame" or to "sublimate" (Mouffe, 2005: 20–21) antagonisms, without eliminating conflict from the political realm.

Still, in this discourse on non-violence there are a number of complexities. First, again the articulation of (liberal) democracy with stateness and the rule of law produces a setting where the rule of law needs to be protected and policed. This tension is resolved through the concept of the monopoly of violence, allocated to the state and its representatives—even though this is not always straightforward, see, e.g., Carey et al. (2013). This construction allows maintaining the ban on violence for those who are not mandated to use violence, through the state's monopoly of violence.

A second complexity is generated by the dubious status of what Bourdieu called symbolic violence, and the fluid borders between incivility and rudeness, critique and violence.[9] Bourdieu referred to symbolic violence (from a gender studies perspective, in *Masculine*

[8] In liberal democracy, Hutchings (1998: 166) stated that the nature of this contract is different, namely that is a "contract of individuals to set up a public, sovereign authority."
[9] One classic example is Stella Nyanzi's poem about the genitals of the mother of the Ugandan president, which landed her in prison. See Benfield and Bratton (2021).

Domination) as "[…] a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling." (Bourdieu, 1998: 1–2) This "logic of domination" uses a "[…] symbolic principle known and recognized both by the dominant and by the dominated […]." (Bourdieu, 1998: 2) In a co-authored book, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 168) defined symbolic violence as "[…] an act of recognition and misrecognition, which is situated beyond the control of the conscious mind and the will, in the misty regions of the schemata of the habitus." Even though the absence of violence is considered a condition of possibility for democracy, there is a degree of toleration towards symbolic violence, with the frontier of acceptability established through political-legal negotiations.

The third complexity is related towards the nature of social relations, when moving away from antagonistic conflict. When considering Mouffe's position on an agonistic-democratic culture, the democratic other becomes an adversary (contrasted with the enemy-other), where the former's identity is structured through a "[…] we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents." (Mouffe, 2005: 20) But this model reduces the possible diversity of democratic others, and more synergetic modes of otherness, as has been, for instance, captured in Carpentier's (2017: 184) palm tree model. One democratic other is the neighbour, which has been addressed in, for instance, the work of Levinas (1978). For Levinas (1978: 159), the neighbour remains an other, but this other-neighbour takes a crucial place, because "[…] my relationship with the Other as neighbor gives meaning to my relations with all the others." Also Bobbio's (1987: 42) idea of brotherhood—referring to the French *'fraternité*') and calling for the "recognition of the bonds of kinship which unite all human beings in a common destiny"—brings in a different model for a democratic other. Finally, Derrida's (2005a) attempt to shift from fraternity to friendship, in his *Politics of Friendship*, offers a key model to think the democratic other, which is more synergetic. Again, these articulations and modes are negotiated in discursive-material political processes, that can articulate these others in a variety of ways, but that all place the other into a sphere of non-violent interactions.

4. Threats to Democracy

As we argued in the first Section (which deals with the core components of democracy), democracy is inherently unstable and contingent, as its main objective—to decentralize power relations, at least to some degree—produces power oscillations, where societal elites are tempted to strengthen their power positions and weaken (or undermine) the participatory component of democracy, in some cases out of mere self-interest, in other cases to protect (their perception of) the general interest, for instance, to enhance the efficiency of decision-making or transcend societal conflict, as is the case with so-called 'technocratic governments'. Moreover, the reach of democracy—dealing only with the politics of institutionalized decision-making or, in contrast, implementing its broad application in the realm of the political—produces more contestations about democracy's nature, bringing some authors to argue that democracy is "unrealized" (Enwezor et al., 2002), always "to come" (Derrida, 2005b) or simply inexistant (Dahl, 1971). To expand on the latter: Dahl's (1971) usage of the concept of polyarchy is driven by the idea that

democracy, with its “continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens,” (Dahl, 1971: 1) simply does not exist. To use his words: “since (in my view) no large system in the real world is fully democratized, I prefer to call real world systems that are closest to the upper right corner [of his liberalization/inclusiveness model] polyarchies.” (Dahl, 1971: 8) Using a different vocabulary, Derrida wrote about democracy-to-come, also arguing that democracy has not (yet) presented itself:

> “In the end, if we try to return to the origin, we do not yet know what *democracy* will have meant nor what democracy is. For democracy does not present itself; it has not yet presented itself, but that will come. In the meantime let's not stop using a word whose heritage is undeniable even if its meaning is still obscured, obfuscated, reserved. Neither the word nor the thing ‘democracy’ is yet presentable.” (Derrida, 2005b: 9—emphasis in original)

Thomson (2015: 97), writing about Derrida’s democracy-to-come, summarized the latter’s thoughts in the following manner:

> “in the phrase ‘democracy-to-come’ we should hear not the security of a glorious democratic future guaranteed by the extension of global justice, but something more like the continued unfolding of a traumatic event of political struggle.”

Democracy itself—with its diverse discursive articulations (in different societal fields) and material practices—is not excluded from political conflict, and, as also already mentioned in the first Section of this text, some political projects aim to disrupt, dislocate or destroy democracy. In particular authoritarian models have posed significant threats to democracy, although they are not the only ones—also communist, libertarian and anarchist models have (had) the objective to replace democracy, even though those with non-authoritarian ambitions currently only pose a limited threat to democracy. This is why we will focus on the discursive-material threats posed by the authoritarian models, with their tendency to (re-) centralize power and weaken the rule of law.

At the same time, some political struggles (*within* democracies) can also undermine democracy from the inside, with, for instance, attempts to violate the human rights of particular parts of the population, and to tolerate (or even stimulate) violent practices, within the democratic state, or in relations with other states. Also the withdrawal from politics and its struggles poses a potential threat to democracy. But the threat to democracy that will be discussed first, is more philosophical (or discursive, one could say), even when it might still structurally hollow out democracy in almost invisible ways, by not fulfilling its promises.

4.1. Democracy’s Unfulfilled Promises

Thomson’s (2015: 97) reflections about Derrida’s democracy-to-come highlights the “promissory structure” of democracy, which combines “both the risk of less democracy, and the possibility of more.” In *The Other Heading*, Derrida (1992: 78—emphasis removed) described this promisory structure in the following terms: Democracy-to-come is

> “not something that is certain to happen tomorrow, not the democracy (national or international, state or trans-state) of the future, but a democracy that must have the structure of a promise-and thus the memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now.”

For Derrida (2005b: 86), democracy is aporetic, which means that it “will never exist, in the sense of a present existence”; and Derrida (2005b: 86—emphasis removed) lists the following contradictions as explanations:

> “force without force, incalculable singularity and calculable equality, commensurability and incommensurability, heteronomy and autonomy, indivisible sovereignty and divisible or shared sovereignty, an empty name, a despairing messianicity or a messianicity in despair, and so on.”

In a slightly more concrete version, Thomson (2015) focussed on one of these contradictions, and the unfulfilled promise it generated, when writing about the contradiction between equality and excellence. Even when the participatory dimension protects democratic societies against the dictatorship of a king-philosopher, who might be less excellent, wise and benevolent than Plato wished for, the material dynamics and processes of democratic decision-making might not always result in excellent decisions or elected representatives either. In this sense, the material practice of democracy (potentially) dislocates the discourse of democracy as ideal.[10] Thomson (2015: 94) develops this argument as follows:

> “Because democracy presumes the basic equality of its citizens, it threatens to undo philosophy’s promise to make distinctions based on excellence, and hence to identify the best regime. Because decisions are to be based on the counting of opinions, rather than the identification of truth, democracy will never live up to the philosophical ideal.”

But the tension between “incalculable singularity and calculable equality” (Derrida, 2005b: 86—emphasis removed) is not the only one that characterizes democracy’s (unfulfilled) promises. At least equally important is the tension between commensurability and incommensurability, which brings us to the notion of the decision, which, in Laclau’s vocabulary, can be seen to refer to the moment of fixation, where “discourses are articulated in particular ways and discursive struggles are waged, leading to particular outcomes.” (Carpentier, 2016a: 95) At the same time, there is “a radical undecidability that needs to be constantly superseded by acts of decision.” (Laclau, 1996: 92) This implies that the decisions made in a democracy—or in any other governing structure, for that matter—are never final, but always need to be followed by an endless stream of novel decisions, never able to fully resolve or close societal conflicts. Resolutions deemed final become

[10] Attempts to remedy this tension can be found in a series of signifying practices, such as, for instance, Winston Churchill’s famous statement during his House of Commons speech on 11 November 1947, where he said that “Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” (https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1947/nov/11/parliament-bill)

unsettled by changing contexts, rendering democracy's decision-making processes (and their outcomes) imperfect and necessarily frustrating.

When Derrida (2005b: 86—emphasis removed) refers to the tension between "heteronomy and autonomy", he touches upon the tension in democracy between the self and the other, where the self sees their autonomy curtailed by "a law come from the other" and "a responsibility and decision of the other." (Derrida, 2005b: 84) As he continues: "It is thus a question of separating democracy and autonomy, something that is, I concede, more than difficult, indeed im-possible," especially because there is also an "other in me, an other greater and older than I am." (Derrida, 2005b: 84) This tension also connects to the desire for homogeneity—the wish that all others are the same. It is the desire for, in Derrida's words (2005b: 14), "symmetry, homogeneity, the same, the like, the semblable or the similar."

Finally, another tension that Derrida (2005b: 86—emphasis removed) mentioned—which contributes to the unfulfilled promise of democracy—is the one between "indivisible sovereignty and divisible or shared sovereignty", where the former, in relation to the nation-state, "is being more and more called into question." This tension is the Derridean version of the discussion on multilevel governance, as Fanoulis and Musliu (2017: 13) explained: "The idea of pooled/shared sovereignty focalises on the prospect of fully attaining a European home beyond nation-states." Here, the tension is—at least partially—related to the displacement of the centre(s) of decision-making, generating unclarity and hampering transparency and accountability. Moreover, also the political conflicts between the different intra-state, state and extra-state level decision-making centres might impede on the democratic quality of decision-making, privileging power struggles between different levels over the development of policies.

As argued before, for the case of (maximalist) participation (Carpentier, 2014), also the (unfilled) promise of full democracy could be approached through the Lacanian concept of fantasy. It is important to stress that in Lacanian psycho-analytic theory, fantasy is conceptualized as having (among others) a protective role (Lacan, 1979: 41), and remains connected to drive and desire, which also shows fantasy's generative capacities. The full democratic fantasy—or ideal—then becomes an engine, that drives us towards the logics of equalized power-sharing and maximalist participation, through the promise of the *jouissance* that it will produce. At the same time, the discursive and material tensions that characterize democratic practice render the realization of the fantasy of full democracy impossible. As Lacan (1989: 111) has put it: "'That's not it' is the very cry by which the jouissance obtained is distinguished from the jouissance expected." This also implies that the fantasy of full democracy will always be frustrated, as it can never be completely achieved, which may backfire and jeopardize democracy itself.

4.2. The Threat of Non-Participation

One of the key discussions that captures this frustration, deals with political apathy, or non-participation. The absence of the material practices of citizen participation—for instance, through non-voting—is seen as a threat to democracy, as it disrupts one of the necessary components of democracy, namely the presence of both participation and representation.

Different arguments are used to ground this concern, including the idea that the lack of care for democracy would weaken the popular defence against the elites' tendency to strengthen their power positions in society. Also the idea that the different levels of political apathy in different parts of, or groups in, society would divide the political community, feeds into these concerns. One example is Edsall and Edsall's (1991: 282) analysis of the consequences of "political cynicism and alienation":

> "the American experiment itself, endangered by a rising tide of political cynicism and alienation, and by basic uncertainties as to whether or not we are capable of transmitting a sense of inclusion and shared citizenship across an immense and diverse population—whether or not we can uphold our traditional commitment to the possibilities for justice and equality expressed in our founding documents and embedded in our most valued democratic institutions."

Still, the threat of political apathy is not recognized (as such) by all scholars, as the appreciation of apathy as a threat intersects with the position authors take in the debate about the balance between participation and representation—which is one of the key areas of political struggle over democracy. This renders, as DeLuca (1995: 10) writes, also the notion of political apathy a contested notion: "In democratic discourse, political apathy is an important appraisive concept, yet in accepting a particular set of criteria for its proper application, one goes some way toward accepting, even ratifying, a complementary democratic theory as well."

This is translated in the question whether political apathy is exclusively negative, or whether—as Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954: 314) wrote—the "Lack of interest by some people is not without its benefits, too." A few years later, Eulau (1956: 260) linked non-participation to a "politics of happiness", comparing the USA with Europe, stating that "the over-politicalization of many European countries is the product of a politics of unhappiness. The greater involvement of Europeans in their public affairs is not, *ipso facto*, an unmitigated good." This is what Green (2004: 747) calls the "realist apologist view", which tends to align with the more elitist-democratic theories (that argue for more minimalist versions of participation). Green (2004: 747) contrasts this view to the perspective which sees political apathy as "an unambiguous limit to the flourishing of democratic ideals which hinders the realization of a 'true' egalitarian government." Still, one could argue—following DeLuca (1995: 10)—that these different positions all still require a certain level of participation, without which democracy would become jeopardized. In other words, the structural absence of the material enactment of participation is still to be acknowledged as a threat for democracy.

These two democratic-theoretical positions have also developed different explanatory frameworks, which DeLuca (1995: 11) calls the 'two faces' of political apathy. While more elitist-democratic theories emphasize "individual responsibility for nonparticipation", participatory-democratic theory "shifts responsibility or attributes causal agency to other sources, perhaps elites, institutional practices, social structures, or even the organizing principles of a society." Of course, as Green (2004: 746) wrote, it would be "unwise to insist too strongly upon the neatness of the opposition between apathy in which the individual chooses to withdraw from active political life and sociological forms of apoliticism which

unburden the individual of responsibility for political silence." Or, as Eliasoph (1998: 255) put it, in a more poetic language:

> "Simple apathy never explained the political silence I heard. Inside of 'apathy' was a whole underwater world of denials, omissions, evasions, things forgotten, skirted, avoided, and suppressed - a world as varied and colorful as a tropical undersea bed."

Still, the choice of an individual *not* to participate in democracy remains to be considered legitimate.[11] For this purpose, Carpentier (2011a: 126) used the concept of 'the right not to participate': "participation [is] to be seen as invitational, which implies that the enforcement of participation is defined as contradictory to the logics of participation, and that the right not to participate should be respected." Similarly, Habermas (1996: 499) wrote that "A legal duty, say, to make active use of democratic rights has something totalitarian about it." Earlier, in the same text, Habermas (1996: 120) included a similar statement:

> "Private autonomy extends as far as the legal subject does *not* have to give others an account or give publicly acceptable reasons for her action plans. Legally granted liberties entitle one to *drop out* of communicative action, to refuse illocutionary obligations; they ground a privacy freed from the burden of reciprocally acknowledged and mutually expected communicative freedoms."

4.3. The (Re)centralization of Power

The relationship between participation and representation can also be affected by elites increasing their power positions, countering the decentralization of power that characterizes democracy. Katsambekis (2023) mentions some of the different labels used to describe this process:

> "Authoritarianism becomes 'authoritarian populism', or just 'populism'. Similarly, 'illiberalism', 'anti-pluralism', 'demagoguery' or (new) 'despotism', among others, emerge as alternative names to describe the threat, while even various versions of fascism (that is, prefascism, neo-fascism) have been put back on the table."

This threat to democracy is partially represented as an external threat, as Keane (2020: 11) did in *The New Despotism*, with the warning that the "world is gradually being shaped by self-confidently alternative methods of governing people." This leads Keane to state that:

> "Today's most obvious threats to democracy—the inner decay and corruption of a declining American empire and the growing global ascendancy of a powerful China—seem for the moment to be more funereally paced [than in the 1920s and early 1930s period]." (Keane, 2020: 11-12)

Keane's (2020: 14) "first-cut" definition of despotism—"despotism is a new type of pseudo-democratic government led by rulers skilled in the arts of manipulating and meddling with

[11] The discussion about the legitimacy of non-participation is important, but it remains distinct from the analysis of the causes of non-participation.

people's lives, marshaling their support, and winning their conformity"—also provides the space for the inclusion of democratic states. Hungary, for instance, features prominently in *The New Despotism*. Here, Keane's (2020: 17) argument is that "new despotisms experiment with locally made democratic procedures such as elections, public forums, and anticorruption agencies"; he labels them "phantom democracies."

Although Keane's qualification of Hungary—as controlled by a despotic regime—is questionable, it does raise important issues about more authoritarian tendencies within (European) democracies, and their problematic relationship with (respect for) the rule of law and human rights. One concept—that has often been used in Hungary's context (see, e.g., Krekó and Enyedi, 2018)—is the notion of illiberal democracy, with Zakaria (1997) as one of the early contributors to this debate. For Zakaria (1997: 24), an illiberal democracy "mixes a substantial degree of democracy with a substantial degree of illiberalism," organizing democratic elections but "ignoring constitutional limits on their power and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms." (Zakaria, 1997: 22) Kauth and King (2021: 370) wrote that in illiberal democracies "options for voicing discontent are already limited, participation in the political process is made increasingly difficult, and the rule of law is frequently undermined to serve the government's objectives."

Even though Zakaria's (1997) interpretation of illiberal democracy also implies taking a position in the struggle between procedural and substantive democracy, Zakaria emphasizes the threat that illiberal democracy poses for undermining the hegemony of liberal democracy:

> "Illiberal democracies gain legitimacy, and thus strength, from the fact that they are reasonably democratic. Conversely, the greatest danger that illiberal democracy poses—other than to its own people—is that it will discredit liberal democracy itself, casting a shadow on democratic governance." (Zakaria, 1997: 42)

Apart from illiberal democracy, also authoritarian populism has been used to describe the rise of regimes that aim to (re)centralize power. Populism is here defined as a discourse that constructs an antagonistic relation between elite and people (Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2015: 2), but when populism becomes articulated with governance and leadership, it combines a horizontal with a vertical dimension, arguing for the replacement of the 'old' elite (the 'establishment') by a 'new' elite who are seen as being a genuine part of the people and thus entitled to their leadership position. Often, this implies a reliance "on strong leaders who are able to mobilize the masses and/or conduct their parties with the aim of enacting radical reforms." (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017: 62) Authoritarian populism, with "the combination of authoritarian values disguised by populist rhetoric" is regarded by Norris and Inglehart (2019: 6) "as potentially the most dangerous threat to liberal democracy."

In establishing the nature of this threat to democracy, it is worth returning to Zakaria's (1997: 22) introduction, where he cites the USA diplomat Richard Holbrooke, providing an example of Popper's paradox of tolerance, when stating, before the 1996 elections in Bosnia: "'Suppose the election was declared free and fair,' he [Holbrooke] said, and those elected are 'racists, fascists, separatists, who are publicly opposed to [peace and

reintegration]'." Popper (1947: 226) formulated this paradox in the following terms: "if we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them." Even though the material articulation of democratic procedures can be considered part of a struggle *within* democracy, the concern is that the paradox of tolerance will result in the destruction of democracy from *within*. Concepts such as 'democratic backsliding' (Bermeo, 2016), 'democratic erosion' (Schedler, 1998; Plattner, 2014), 'autocratization' (Cassani and Tomini, 2020) are indicators that democracies can self-destruct, but also that this is an (extensive) process, with a long duration, that thus can—potentially—be reversed. Still, these concepts also indicate that democracies can be threatened through the centralization of power by particular political elites.

4.4. Closing Down the 'Corral'

The fourth threat to democracy concerns the functioning (and delimitation) of the political community. As the intersection of democracy with the state has become hegemonic, the political community is restricted through the notion of citizenship, even though counter-hegemonic models, such as cosmopolitan democracy (e.g., Held, 1995; Archibugi, 2008) do exist. Derrida (2005b: 53) extends these boundaries even further, by, for instance, referring to ecological democracy (Disch, 2016):

> "does this measure of the immeasurable, this democratic equality, end at citizenship, and thus at the borders of the nation-state? Or must we extend it to the whole world of singularities, to the whole world of humans assumed to be like me, my compeers [*mes semblables*]—or else, even further, to all nonhuman living beings, or again, even beyond that, to all the non-living, to their memory, spectral or otherwise, to their to-come or to their indifference with regard to what we think we can identify, in an always precipitous, dogmatic, and obscure way, as the life or the living present of living [*la vivance*] in general?"

Still, the hegemonic articulation of the state with democracy unavoidably produces delimitations in relation to who is included in the political community and who is not (as was already mentioned earlier, in Section one on the discussion on the core elements of democracy). The question here is *how* this frontier is constructed and policed, how diversity within this frontier is handled and what the—potentially negative—consequences of these practices can be for democracy itself.

When turning to the first question, then the discussion concerns the permeability of the frontiers delimitating democracy (through the articulation of citizenship) and the nature of the measures to prevent entry or inclusion. This brings us to discussions on migration, and the existence of an "underlying hierarchical concept of humanity that casts migrants, and other minorities, as standing outside the boundaries of rights to liberty and equal treatment." (Kauth and King, 2021: 369) When the state becomes a 'corral', or a "biopolitical space where populations are trained for the circulation of labour and capital" (Schinkel and Van Reekum, 2019: 11—our translation), disabling the possibility to enter, sometimes subjecting those who try to the "politics of death" (as is currently the case in the Mediterranean) (Schinkel and Van Reekum, 2019: 10), then democracy's ethical basis and

legitimacy become weakened. As Schinkel and Van Reekum (2019: 142) remind us, migration is constructed through borders, which are discursive-material assemblages in their own right, "as if there can be something as 'life-behind-a-border' […] As if borders exist without them being transgressed […]." Still, the logic of the corral generates difference: "because you are in your where-ness, you are always right [and] you should always be able to say what you want about those who move beyond their where-ness." (Schinkel and Van Reekum, 2019: 144)

This implies that also *within* the delimited realm of democracy, democracy can be threatened. An old example is the discussion of the tyranny of the majority, which captures situations where an elected majority takes decisions that go against the interest of particular minority groups, depriving that minority of "its primary political rights," (Dahl, 1989: 171) and generating an oppressive situation. These concerns are quite old. For instance, in his *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville (2010: 413-414) wrote: "what repels me the most in America is not the extreme liberty that reigns there; it is the slight guarantee against tyranny that is found." de Tocqueville (2010: 415) links this potential tyranny to government, when, for instance, writing that "Tyranny can be exercised by means of the law itself," while John Stuart Mill (2003: 76) also includes societal forms of tyranny in *On Liberty*:

> "the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still vulgarly, held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of the public authorities. But reflecting persons perceived that when society is itself the tyrant—society collectively, over the separate individuals who compose it—its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries."

More contemporary debates, for instance about denizenship,[12] still focus on exclusionary practices towards minorities. For instance, in their discussion on illiberalism, Kauth and King (2021: 367) distinguish between disruptive illiberalism and ideological illiberalism, with the latter refers to the "unequal allocation of rights and duties," which is connected to exclusion.[13] Kauth and King (2021: 375)—based on Behrend and Whitehead's (2016) discussion—are careful not to qualify all forms of social exclusion, and the "uncomfortable situations" they generate, as "anti-democratic structures." As Behrend and Whitehead (2016: 6) specify: "The political illiberalism that concerns us here involves actively discriminatory features of subnational politics that severely limit or render ineffective formal citizenship claims."

In all these cases, whether we label them exclusionary practices or the tyranny of the majority, democracy becomes suspended for particular groups, whether they are blocked from become part of the political community, or whether their membership is only partially acknowledged. Even though radical proceduralists might disagree, the violation of the human rights of a part of society harms and threatens democracy as a whole.

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[12] Denizenship originally (see Hammar, 1989) referred to the (reduced) rights of permanent residents in a foreign country. Here, we use it in the expanded meaning, as the reduced political, civil and social citizenship rights (see Marshall, 1992) within a populace. Turner (2016) calls the latter denizenship type 2.
[13] In contrast, disruptive illiberalism refers to the "disguised anti-democratic attacks of autocrats in the making." (Kauth and King, 2021: 367)

4.5. Violence, Antagonistic Other(ing)s and War

The last threat to democracy is related to democracy's rejection of violence as a decision-making instrument. As already discussed in the Section on the conditions of possibility of democracy, violence needs to be differentiated from conflict, as the latter is a much broader concept. While conflict is perfectly acceptable in democracies—and arguably even necessary—violence is required to be removed from democracy through the functioning of the rule of law, and the allocation of the monopoly of violence to the state.

Derrida (2005a: 22) has emphasized the importance of what he calls the "community of friends", when writing that "there is no democracy without respect for irreducible singularity or alterity, but there is no democracy without the 'community of friends', without the calculation of majorities, without identifiable, stabilizable, representable subjects, all equal." Writing more explicitly about violence, Keane (2004: 1) labelled violence as the "greatest enemy of democracy":

> "unwanted physical interference with the bodies of others, such that they experience pain and mental anguish and, in the extreme case, death – violence, in a word–is the greatest enemy of democracy as we know it. Violence is anathema to its spirit and substance."

A variation of this position, that focusses less on the role of state violence, can be found in Powell's (1982: 154) work:

> "Where large-scale violence or coercion does appear, democracy is fundamentally threatened. Not only does the influence of coercion on decisionmaking weaken the importance of democratic resources, but the failure of government to maintain order and security leads citizens to look more positively on authoritarian alternatives."

This articulation of violence as a threat to democracy does not imply that violence remains completely absent in democracies—as, for instance, Mouffe (2000: 131) has argued. Within democratic states, violence, labelled as crime, occurs on a semi-permanent basis. Sophisticated systems to reduce its occurrence and to temper its impact on society have been developed. But this produces new problems. Keane (2004: 174) points to the complex balance in which these punitive responses are situated, always risking the activation of disproportionate state violence to oppress dissent:

> "Getting violent with violence is, however, risky. It cultivates the illusion that the violence of imprisonment and capital punishment reduces violent crime. [...] The key problem is the chain reaction that is triggered when violent power is exercised over others. The power to get others to do what they would otherwise avoid doing, backed by violent means, easily breeds arrogance, the belief that the powerful are immune from responsibility towards others who are meanwhile forced to suffer pain and humiliation. A culture of control spreads. And whenever arrogance mixes with

> violence and power, the temptation to brutalise the bodies of those who resist is just around the corner."

One problematic example is the use of lethal force by police officers, which, in particular in the USA, has attracted major public attention. The shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, USA in 2014, is one of the recent pivotal moments, feeding into the establishment of the Black Lives Matter movement, but police violence in the USA has a much older history (Chevigny, 1995; Johnson, 2003). More recent projects, as for instance, *The Counted*, by the British *The Guardian* newspaper,[14] show the widespread nature of police killings in the USA. And projects like these, as Seigel (2018: 182) argued, "confirm the profound racism of police killings, the higher rate of such killings in the United States as opposed to other countries, the high percentage of all homicides committed by police, and the high likelihood that unarmed people will perish at the hands of police." Excessive police violence is a threat to democracy, as it reduces the legitimacy of the state's monopoly of violence, feeds a culture of fear and oppression, violates a sense of justice and ethics, and provokes more (and equally problematic) violence in response.

At the same time, care should be taken not to underestimate the disruptive forces of (organized) crime, also for democracy, as the workings of, for instance, the Italian mafia, with its corruption, has illustrated (Schneider and Schneider, 2003). Corruption, in its many different versions, and "widespread perceptions of corruption—entail a host of public and private costs. One of the most serious and lasting is the erosion of confidence in the very legitimacy of public governance," as Marshall (2021: 2) wrote. Structurally, organized crime—and relationships between organized crime and the field of politics—are threatening for democracy as they generate zones of illegitimate privilege and profit, and fear and harm, disrupting the difficult balance between freedom, difference and equality that characterizes democracy, bringing in structural injustice into the political realm, which, in itself, is already a disruptive force.

One particular type of violence with which the state is confronted is political violence and terrorism, which can again take many different forms. Bermeo (2016) discusses election-day vote fraud and the strategic manipulation of the elections, where the latter includes "hampering media access, using government funds for incumbent campaigns, keeping opposition candidates off the ballot, hampering voter registration, packing electoral commissions, changing electoral rules to favor incumbents, and harassing opponents—but all done in such a way that the elections themselves do not appear fraudulent." (Bermeo, 2016: 13) But there are also more intense versions of political violence. For instance, Powell (1982) discusses separatist violence, and military and executive coups. Moreover, also Europe has had its fair share of political assassinations. But also terrorism has posed a considerable threat to democracy, as it often aims to inflict damage to democracy itself. Here, not only the damage done to people and property matters, but also how democratic states respond. Wilkinson (2006: 20) describes this as follows:

> "If the government is provoked into introducing emergency powers, suspending democracy in order to defend it, there is always the risk that by using heavy

[14] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/series/counted-us-police-killings

> repression to crush the terrorist campaign the authorities may alienate the innocent majority of citizens caught up in the procedures of house-to-house searches and interrogations."

A more complicated debate concerns the democratic threat of symbolic violence, and the impact that (the communication of) antagonism can have. As mentioned before, in the section on the conditions of possibility of democracy, there is a considerable toleration towards the deployment of symbolic violence, also because of its fluid borders with democratically legitimate practices. Moreover, there is also considerable silence about structural (material) violence in society, as Keane (2004: 191)—using rape as example—writes: "Democracies continue to harbour many forms of violence that are suffered in silence", where this silence can also be considered a form of symbolic violence. At the same time, the thin lines between (symbolic) violence, incivility, playfulness and critique—combined with the silence about violence—feed the toleration for symbolic violence, which in turn, ironically, acts as protection towards democracy. Still, communicatively antagonistic societies risk that symbolic violence becomes complemented with physical-material violence, which increases its harmfulness towards democracy.

Finally, democracies can also be exposed to external violence, as already mentioned in the discussion on the increased presence of despotic regimes, and their competitive stance towards democratic states. But democracies themselves can also unleash deadly violence themselves, as the 'war on terror' has demonstrated. Cox, Levine and Newman (2009: x) then ask—in relation to this 'war on terror'—the following question: "What has become and what is to become of the very idea of a democracy given the lawlessness and barbarity of democratic nations like the US?" It is this question that suggests that wars waged by democracies, outside their territories, also affect (and threaten) these democracies themselves.

As Agamben (2005) has argued—in his *State of Exception*—that these military logics feed into the suspension of democratic rights, motivated through a discourse of exceptionality. He adds the concern that "Faced with the unstoppable progression of what has been called a 'global civil war'; the state of exception tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics." (Agamben, 2005: 2) This renders the state of exception "a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism," (Agamben, 2005: 3) and—as a warning—he cited Rossiter (1948: 314), who wrote the following "grotesque" (Agamben, 2005: 9) words, in all seriousness: "No sacrifice is too great for our democracy; least of all the temporary sacrifice of democracy itself." A position more aligned with Agamben's critique, can be found in Derrida's (2005b: 40) *Rogue*:

> "we see an American administration, potentially followed by others in Europe and in the rest of the world, claiming that in the war it is waging against the 'axis of evil', against the enemies of freedom and the assassins of democracy throughout the world, it must restrict within its own country certain so-called democratic freedoms and the exercise of certain rights by, for example, increasing the powers of police investigations and interrogations, without anyone, any democrat, being really able to oppose such measures. [...] It must thus come to resemble these enemies, to corrupt itself and threaten itself in order to protect itself against their threats."

Part 2: Media and Democracy

In Part two of this book, we will focus on the intersection of democracy and media, following the same structure of Part one. First, we will engage in a discussion on what—in a contemporary era—defines media, connecting this debate to public sphere theories (and a series of related concepts). That will allow us to elaborate more on the roles that media play in democracy, but also on the struggles, conditions of possibility and threats.

5. Core Components of Media

5.1 Defining Media

The word ‘medium’ was adopted from the Latin language, where it was the substantivized, neutral form of the adjective ‘medius’ (meaning ‘in the middle of’, ‘mediating’). Etymologically, medium is related to many other words, including the German ‘Mitte’, the Italian ‘Intermezzo’ (‘interlude’; from Latin ‘intermedius’, which means ‘between something’, the ‘middle’) as well as the French ‘milieu’ (‘environment’ or ‘company’; ‘middle’ came from the Old French ‘mi’ (‘half’, ‘in the middle’, from the Latin ‘medius’) and from the Old French ‘lieu’ (‘place’, from the Latin ‘locus’). All these related forms are traced back to Indo-European ‘medhio’ (meaning ‘middle’ or ‘centre’).

Based on this, Mock (2006) identifies four basic understandings of the medium/media concept: (1) media as a means of perception (as a ‘prerequisite’ for communication), (2) media as a means of understanding, (3) media as a means of dissemination, as well as (4) media as a form of communication. Speaking more broadly, the term media has a rich philosophical and democratic-theoretical history, which is strongly related to the development of ‘new’ technological media (Guillory, 2010), at different times in history. This also implies that the (meaning of the) concept of media is not stable over time and place. Still, we still need to acknowledge that these different kinds of media—together, in always varying ways, with always different technological-institutional assemblages—constitute and mediate a dynamic space of communication, in which (some) political phenomena that are—or could be—of significance for the members of a society or group are made visible and discussed, in particular ways, with always particular affordances (Norman, 1988).

An important delimitation, though, is that we not concerned with symbolically generalized media such as power, money, and love, which are discussed in sociological systems theory, nor with language (or our bodies) in the sense that it is grounded in the “biological organization” (Elias, 2001: 11) of humans and society. By media we mean, staying relatively close to our everyday language usage of the concept, the technological-institutional assemblages that we as humans use to communicate across place and time. Kubicek (1997) has called these “second-order media.” In Kubicek’s terminology, “first-order media” are technological systems with certain functions and potentials for the dissemination of information in the technical sense of the word, for example the ‘Internet’ as TCP and IP protocols. The concept of “Second-order media” implies the addition of socio-cultural institutions of communication to the assemblage. In our example, we are no longer talking

about the ‘internet’ in a technical meaning, but about, for example, the specific medium of the online newspaper and its journalists.

In a (too) narrow sense, mass media are thus understood to be the technical means that are suitable for the mass dissemination of statements to a multitude of people, i.e., the press, film, radio (broadcasting), television and the internet. In addition to the technological side, though, also the mass media concept has an institutional meaning, which allows for the incorporation of the organizations that produce the messages of mass communication, such as publishing houses and broadcasting companies. Through their selection and producing practices, mass media communicate signifying practices, but also discourses. They broadly communicate an idea of reality, i.e., they co-construct reality. Mass media work in a complex set of conditions that is composed, among other things, of the norms (and laws) of the overarching media system, the economic (capitalist) modalities, the cluster of (media) professional identities, the specificities of their own media organization, editorial processes and routines as well as the individual professional understanding of their roles.

In other words, the core defining element is that these assemblages include communication technologies, but articulate these machines with organizational structures (and a degree of institutionalization), allowing media to provide certain services for communicative action (Beck, 2006: 14). Media thus become signifying machines (Carpentier, 2017: 62), that allow to circulate signifying practices inside and outside their organizational boundaries, which, in turn, allows for the circulation of discourses, but also for their validation and (potential) modification. Simultaneously—as Huhtamo and Parikka (2011) argued—media are also deeply material, through the technologies they articulate within their assemblages, but also because of their organizational (infra)structures and the bodies of their operators, ranging from journalists to printers, from IT specialists to managers, and more.

Arguably, the second core defining element of media are their audiences. As media are driven by the practice of communication, as signifying practices, they need an audience to complete their identity. At the same time, this concept is, in itself, highly contingent, or in the words of Carpentier et al. (2004): ungraspable. One illustration of this fluidity (and the difficulties it brings) is the Allor-Harley exchange, where Allor (1988a: 228) concluded in his discussion of the different articulations of the concept of audience that “the audience exists nowhere; it inhabits no real space, only positions within analytic discourses.” After Hartley’s (1988) critique, Allor (1988b: 252) changed this thesis in “the audience exists everywhere,” without giving up on his discursive approach towards the audience. There are many approaches to structuring how the concept of audience is theorized, and a “totalizing account [is] a logical impossibility” (Jenkins, 1999). One way to capture this diversity is the identification of the two major dimensions that are labelled active/passive and micro/macro, based on Littlejohn’s (1996: 310) *Theories of Human Communication*, where he wrote that:

> “disputes on the nature of the audience seem to involve two related dialectics. The first is a tension between the idea that the audience is a mass public versus the idea that it is a small community. The second is the tension between the idea that the audience is passive versus the belief that it is active.”

One particular audience articulation that is the audience as public, which constructs the audience as political actor. Again, we encounter the same significatory complexity as with the audience (see Coleman and Ross, 2010, on the public's multiple meanings), but here the notion of the citizen—and not the consumer—produces the nodal point of this articulation. In Dewey's (1946: 27) words, published in 1927, "For the essence of the consequences which call a public into being is the fact that they expand beyond those directly engaged in producing them." In a European context, the public is closely connected to the public service media tradition, as Ang (1991) argued. In this tradition, the public is a collective of "citizens who must be reformed, educated, informed as well as entertained -in short 'served' – presumably to enable them to better perform their democratic rights and duties." (Ang, 1991: 29) The audience as public articulation also contains already a (relatively weak) reference to the articulation of the audience as community, especially when this collective of citizens is seen as a nation, as an imagined community, or as a political community (Ang, 1991: 36).

The popularization of the internet has also affected the discussions on the identity of the audience, as audience members became constructed as more active. One example here is Bruns's (2007; 2008) concept of the 'produser'. Another contribution that captured this change was Rosen's (2008) essay *The People Formerly Known as the Audience*. Rosen argued that the (commercial) media system has lost control over its audiences, as it has been (re)transformed into "the public made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable." (Rosen, 2008: 165) He describes this change as follows:

> "The people formerly known as the audience are those who were on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another – and who today are not in a situation like that at all." (Rosen, 2008: 163)

More generally, the notion of the user became embraced. In Digital media studies this concept was adopted, partially out of a discomfort with the link between audience and mass communication, as exemplified by Lievrouw and Livingstone's (2006: 27—emphasis in original) introduction to *The Handbook of New Media*:

> "there is an uncertainty over how to label people in terms of their relationship with new media. The term *audience*, which was and to some extent still is satisfactory for mass media research, fits poorly within the domain of new media. In a number of important ways, audiences are becoming 'users'. […] the term 'user' […] better covers this variety of modes of engagement."

Arguably, one of main reasons why the notion of the user became popular was because of its capacity to emphasize online audience activity, where people were seen to 'use' media technologies and content more actively.[15] But we can turn this argument around, to show

[15] For a critical reflection about this identity articulation, see Carpentier et al. (2014: 5).

that the audience (or user) has now become, even more than before, a defining component of media. After all, it is hard to image a materially empty internet.

Given the diversity of the media landscapes, we need to acknowledge that we cannot speak of ‘the’ media (or ‘the’ audience / public). Numerous forms of media (as well as audience / publics) exist side by side. Different rules, norms and conventions apply to these different institutions. Moreover, the process of institutionalization of the respective ‘new’ media is always conflictual, because the rules and norms that are ultimately generally accepted must first be established and legitimized in public discourse. Keywords that characterize these contemporary discussions are the “mediation of everything” (Livingstone, 2009), “cross-media” (Bjur et al., 2014), “polymedia” (Madianou and Miller, 2013) or the “media manifold” (Couldry, 2012). Media are thus part of a comprehensive and complex (mega-) assemblage of practices and technical objects (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 25; Landa, 2006; Luckhurst, 2006) that establishes and maintains the public communicational space. In other words, media need to be understood as a multi-level phenomenon that, in addition to the representational dimension—often the focal point of Communication and Media Studies—has a specific cultural context, but also always implies a structural and subject-related level. Central to this approach to media is the argument that is also elaborated in mediatization research: From a subject-related perspective, media as institutions, spaces of experience and staging apparatuses are not only tools and channels of mediation, but always also offer mechanisms for socialization and for identity construction (cfr. comprehensively Krotz, 2007).

With the advance of digitalization, the dynamics of the production, representation and appropriation of media have reached an additional level of complexity, particularly, not only when it comes to conducting individual media research, but also when attempting to grasp the multi-layered significance of media for democracy. The current media landscape is characterized by the steadily growing field of artificial and virtual communication through and with software and algorithms (cfr. extensively Hepp, 2016; Schäfer and Wessler, 2020), but also by resulting changes in selection, reception and appropriation of media discourse by the (media) audience (cfr. Hasebrink, 2015) or their practices (Lünenborg and Raetsch, 2018).

The rise of algorithms and communicative robots (Hepp, 2020) has generated a “third order medium” with powerful information intermediaries. Their activities and underlying assumptions are often opaque, virtually the trade secret of private companies that created intermediary applications such as Facebook, YouTube, iTunes, Google or Reddit. Also in this case, they are not ‘only’ technical platforms that reflect already-existing media realities: Algorithms increasingly curate the respective media reality of every individual (e.g., Sørensen, 2020), on the basis of massively collected user data, which challenges the traditional journalistic media and existing media policies (Puppis and Ali, 2023).

5.2 Media as Part of the Public Sphere

One way to further connect media, with its communicative public spaces, to society is through the concept of the public sphere. The central theoretical-analytical idea behind this concept is that the public sphere is constituted by elusive forms of social and cultural

groupings that reflexively articulate themselves through specific political—but also cultural discourses—by deploying a set of material infrastructures. The public sphere is not conceived here as a passive entity; it is formed in the process of naming it. In the late modern society, all kinds of media operate with the public sphere and play there a vital role, as Hartley (1999: 218) pointed out:

> "Hence the public sphere can be rethought not as a category binarily contrasted with its implied opposite, the private sphere, but as a 'Russian doll' enclosed within a larger mediasphere, itself enclosed within the semiosphere. And within 'the' public sphere, there may equally be found, Russian-doll style, further countercultural, oppositional or minoritarian public spheres. For instance, an indigenous public sphere, a feminist public sphere, even a music sphere."

In this context, Dahlgren (2006: 275) pointedly drew attention to the entanglement of the private and the public in the public sphere:

> "While it is important to make distinctions, boundaries need to be rethought if we are not to be misled. As has been pointed out often, the idea of 'public' is associated implacably with reason, rationality, objectivity, argument, work, text, information and knowledge (and, de facto, one might add, discursively dominant, masculine and Caucasian). 'Private' resonates with the personal, emotion, intimacy, subjectivity, identity, consumption, aesthetics, style, entertainment, popular culture and pleasure. If this whole side is walled off analytically from our understanding of politics, then we will never be able to understand, for example, the motivations, identities and passions that can launch people into the public sphere."

The political public sphere is thus not a stable entity, but constituted of previously existing and tangible public spheres—from the forum and the agora in antiquity to the bourgeois salons and coffee houses of the Enlightenment—in addition to the public spheres that media offer, including those in the online realm. The result is a complex context of media and publics that are subjected to differentiated conditions and have developed their own rules. In the late modern age, a double concept of the public sphere has emerged: Thus, the contemporary political public sphere can no longer be thought without journalistic mass media from the perspective of democratic theory (Habermas, 1989; Calhoun, 1992). On the first sight they seem to form the institutional core, but there are other media forms and institutions, which also play a vital role, such as, for instance, community media (see Butsch, 2006), but also online media.

It is important to stress that—following authors like Faulstich (2002: 213)—that there are also media that cannot be (or only rarely) associated with the public sphere (e.g., email, letters, telephone) and public spheres that are constituted without media (e.g. public spheres such as schools, pubs or demonstrations). This insight is shared by Communication and Media Studies as well as (most of) Political Studies and Sociology (most prominently Habermas, 1989). Still, there is ample evidence that in late modern societies the media of mass communication are important channels of exchange through which the public sphere is constituted (e.g. Gerhards and Neidhardt, 1991: 54ff.). Schematically, in our perspective, the public sphere represents a constellation of communicative spaces in society. On the one

hand, these allow the circulation of information, ideas, debates, etc.—ideally in an unrestricted manner—and on the other hand, the formation of public opinion. In these spaces, traditional mass media and, more recently, the digital platforms and social network sites play a major role: They not only facilitate the connection between citizens and the political system, but have also institutionalized it (e.g., Gerhards, 1994: 84).

However, this concept raises two general questions that need more attention:

(1) The relationship between the public sphere and the (mass) media: There is still no agreement on how this relationship can be both theoretically described and empirically measured (e.g., Marcinkowski, 2001). Baecker (1996, our translation) described two sides of the relationship:

> "It may be that the mass media find it easier than other systems to access the public sphere and to feed the self-descriptions gained from it into their own system. But it may also be that they find this more difficult because they tend to think of themselves as the public. Some signs of the way the mass media deal with the public tend to suggest that they have a particularly divided relationship with it."

Despite this entanglement, Imhof (2003: 203, our translation) emphasized the broader scope of the public sphere construct from a Communication and Media Studies perspective:

> "On the basis of the normative contents inscribed in the concept of the public sphere, it becomes clear that the public sphere is not absorbed by the media, neither in terms of its political-legal and social-integrative nor in terms of its deliberative fields of meaning."

(2) The relevance of interpersonal communication: Public spaces are not only constituted through media communication, but also within the framework of interpersonal communication. Although media organizations form an important part of the public sphere, also interpersonal communication makes the public sphere come to life. A pragmatic approach to the public sphere systematically integrates the audience into a theory of the public sphere. Following the pragmatism of Dewey (1946), the public sphere can then be understood as an individually determined communication space that emerges in the communicative, mostly media-based practices and interactions of people who perceive themselves as affected in shared problem and action contexts. However, it must be added that mass media push towards a monopolization (or colonization) of the public sphere. For a very long time, television has played a central role here (Hartley, 1999: 157ff.) But until today, important parts of the political public sphere are 'shaped' by the media of mass communication, which also implies that the public sphere is strongly influenced by the characteristics and conditions of mass communication.

As a consequence, research on political communication often focusses on this media public sphere and the signifying practices that publicly unfold within it. This is done by analysing the content of (visible) media representations (positions, patterns of interpretation, resonance, topic careers, etc.) of politically controversial issues. Even in the digital age, this focus on the outcome dimension of the public sphere is conceptually powerful, even if the

actor and organizational perspective and the associated communication practices are conceptually more prominent. But it also offers restrictions, leading, for instance, Brosius (2016: 368, our translation), to propose "[...] a modified model according to which the totality of all communication activities that we can observe constitutes public communication."

Still, keeping Mouffe's (2000) notion of the democratic revolution in mind—and on a more positive note—we should also acknowledge that the feudal public sphere—the display of power and splendour by the prince before his people, which at the same time served to represent and legitimise the feudal system and later absolutism—has withered away. In many countries of the world, their citizens have countered this old public sphere with the revolutionary programme of the democratic public sphere, which contributes to the distribution of political information, generates tools for opinion-formation, and enables political deliberation and participation, and the discursive justification and exercise of power by the people. Practically, this also means that the political public sphere allows for a certain communicative mediation—or more soberly: an exchange of observations—between the sphere of state institutions and their arenas, on the one hand, and the everyday—also political—life of citizens, individually and organized within civil society, on the other hand.

5.3 Democratic Media, Culture and Connection

But public sphere theory is not the only way to think the political relation between media and society. Against the backdrop of the assumption that the civil society is important for the emergence and vitality of the nexus of democracy and media, in the following Subsection, we will discuss Dahlgren's concept of civic cultures (2009), the reflections of Couldry et al. (2007) on public connection and the concept of political discourse culture by Hepp et al. (2012) as examples of theorizations of this political relationship.

With his concept of civic cultures, Dahlgren refers to the dimension of everyday life that are (potentially) relevant for democracy—namely, people's every day and policy-related conversations. According to Dahlgren, conversation is relevant because political issues, often received through media content, are processed in private, discussed and related to personal experiences, expectations and value systems:

> "Civic cultures refer to those dimensions of everyday life that have bearings on how democracy actually functions. Civic cultures can thus be understood as sets of preconditions for populating the public sphere." (Dahlgren, 2005: 319)

Couldry et al.'s (2007) concept of public connection captures the individual involvement in political spaces. In their work, the political is understood very broadly, as a sphere in which matters of general interest are negotiated, whereby people's public connection can be mediatized via the appropriation of certain media content as well as via involvement in associations, political parties, or the like:

> "Public connection is an orientation to a space where, in principle, problems about shared resources are or should be resolved, a space linked, at least indirectly, to

> some common frame of collective action about common resources." (Couldry et al., 2007: 7)

Finally, the concept of cultures of political discourse attempts in a more comprehensive way to grasp the socio-cultural substructure of the political, which is concretized both in media representations and in the journalistic production and civil appropriation practices of political communication. Not isolated from public sphere theory, Hepp et al. (2012: 13) refer to "the culture producing a certain kind of political discourse, both national and transnational" in relation to the construction of Europe, where the latter "involves the various transnational cultural patterns of media communication which mark the transnational stratification of an emerging European society" and thus its multi-segmented nature. They argue that—again in a European context—there are particular ways to construct our realities, or, that, in other words, discursive-material formations are spatially contextualized. Even if Hepp et al. (2012: 5) are very careful not to get caught in an essentialist construction of Europe, and they argue for an analytical approach, they still state that "we must reconstruct this specific European character." They add that these cultures of political discourse are "not harmonious phenomena. They are [...] marked by contradiction and conflict, also including struggle over their character." (Hepp et al., 2012: 28) Moreover, these cultures are

> "multilevel phenomena that are not solely articulated at the level of production [... but] are also manifested at the levels of representation (political discourse in the media), appropriation (citizens making this discourse their own), various forms of identification (defining oneself as related to a certain public issue or part of a certain political unit) and their regulation (patterns of regulating this discourse)." (Hepp et al., 2012: 28-29)

6. The Roles of (European) Media in Democracy

Not only are media and democracy complex discursive-material structures (as Section five has highlighted), but they also intersect in a variety of ways, with every conception of democracy implying certain requirements for media, i.e., for its actors, practices, structures, roles, etc. More proceduralist and minimalist models of democracy focus on the supportive role that media can play in democratic elections, informing the citizenry so that they can optimize their choices. In contrast, more substantive and maximalist approaches have much broader expectations as they articulate media as one of the realms of democracy, and—as in some older reflections—as a fourth estate, a part of institutionalized politics, as "a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making." (Carlyle, 1904: 164)

In these more maximalist versions, the consensus-oriented models of democracy (and participation) emphasize the importance of dialogue and deliberation. They focus on collective decision-making in a public sphere, based on rational arguments, à la Habermas. Other authors (e.g. Fraser, 1990) stress more conflict-oriented approaches and point to the unavoidability of political differences and struggles, seeing the media as crucial sites for struggles over hegemony (Kellner, 1992: 57). What these maximalist versions have in common is, first, that they—implicitly or explicitly—use a broadly defined notion of the political, where the media sphere becomes (partially) integrated into the political. Second,

they articulate multiple sites of societal decision-making, where dialogue, deliberation, debate and struggle play a role within the media sphere itself, and affect the sphere of institutionalized politics, and many other societal spheres. This renders participation multidirectional, as the exercise of communication rights is seen not only to facilitate participation in institutionalized politics, but also as (contributing to) the democratization of a variety of other societal spheres, including the sphere of the media.

More minimalist versions, captured, for example, in such concepts as the informed citizenry—see Schudson (1998) for a critique—and the marketplace of ideas (see, e.g. the libertarian normative media theory (Siebert et al., 1963)), still accept the political nature of the media sphere, but simultaneously articulate it as a support system for institutionalized politics, which allows for opinion formation on matters related to this sphere and facilitates the functioning of representative democracies (Carpentier, 2011a: 67-68).

One of the main areas where these reflections have been developed—and where these ideological struggles are waged—is normative media theory (Hutchins, 1947; Siebert et al., 1963; Merrill, 1974; Altschull, 1984; Hachten, 1984; Picard, 1985; Lowenstein and Merrill, 1990; Keane, 1991; McQuail, 1994: 127ff.; Curran; 1997; Nordenstreng, 1997; Christians et al., 2009). As these normative media theories have received ample attention, we will not go too much into detail here, but it is important to clarify that this (mostly theoretical) (sub)field has generated a diverse range of positions that all speak to the role of media in democracy, and which provides a fertile ground for the discussion in this Section. Equally important is public sphere theory, which we have already discussed in the previous Section. Still, the relationship between these normative conceptions and the empirical realities is not to be taken for granted, as Peters et al. (2004: 6ff., our translation) state:

> “On the one hand as a diagnostic or critical question about possible deficits of real publics, on the other hand as a question about the possibilities or chances of realisation of normative models, which under certain circumstances can be critically turned back against the normative model.”

Given the diversity of discursive-normative constructions (and material realizations) this Section aims to provide an overview of the equally diverse number of roles, keeping in mind that the some of these roles are only appreciated within the more substantive and maximalist approaches to democracy. Following earlier work (Carpentier, 2007: 159), five roles are distinguished: the informational role, the control/watchdog role, the forum role, the representational role, and the participatory role.

6.1. Informing Citizens

The informational role of media in democracy is the most frequently acknowledged role in discussions on the democracy and media nexus, with a strong discursive focus. Through this role, media are seen to fulfil their ‘public contribution’ by supporting the free, individual and public formation of opinion by gathering, selecting and disseminating news on matters of general importance as well as information that every individual needs to find their way in society.

The core of this informational role is the participation of the media in the formation of political opinion, which is immediately and necessarily supported by media freedom. The functioning of a democracy presupposes that the members of its political community have the information they need to form their opinions on all relevant political issues. The media's role then not only becomes to procure, select and compile the necessary information, but also to critically contextualize it, in such a way that their audiences can understand the information (in all its complexities) and can then process it to form its own opinions. In this way, the media establish a link between the people and their elected representatives: Parliamentarians and government can also learn from the media what is thought and wanted 'among the people', and the people can learn what their parliaments and governments intend to do and are doing.

However, there are many political events that are often very complex and also take place away from the public eye. The media can render some of these hidden processes public, draw the public's attention to them and explain the different positions. They can also offer those involved space for additional explanations. At the same time, this opens up possibilities for scrutiny and criticism (see later), since political procedures and their contents can then be questioned. Investigative journalism can also contribute to informing citizens about developments at an early stage, i.e., to warn them of possible undesirable developments or dysfunctions.

Keane (1992) summarizes this informational role by outlining a series of criteria for this role:

- informing as completely, factually and comprehensively as possible,
- contributing to the formation of opinion through free and open discussion, and
- accompanying it with criticism and control through investigative (inquiring and revealing) journalism.

Additionally, in an earlier discussion about the informational role of media, the following democracy-enhancing characteristics of media information were distinguished by Carpentier (2007: 162):

- comprehensible and accessible information
- information oriented on social (inter)action
- positive information
- structural information
- critical information

The informational role of media is at the same time grounded in a series of assumptions whose deconstruction weakens the taken-for-grantedness of this role. First, the information distribution process by (news) media is not a linear process, but open to a wide variety of interpretations by its audience members, which are not ideologically neutral. Second, the distributed information is not neutral either. On a first level the, problems of the selection and distribution of information and the related processes of societal surveillance has been part of academic scrutiny for decades. Only the question of whose information will be offered illustrates the difficulties hidden behind the notion of information. Furthermore, it is epistemologically impossible to map out the exact boundaries between 'factual' information and the representations (or discourses) that information contains. Factuality builds on

representational regimes that are unavoidable in their presence, varied in their nature, and at the same time targeted by hegemonic projects.

6.2. Controlling Power Holders

A second traditional media role in democracy is the control that media can exercise over those in power, a role which is also labelled the watchdog role. Very much inspired by liberalism's critical position towards (political) power holders, the media can exercise a protective role towards democracy by publicizing abuses of power (Curran, 1996: 83), which allocates to media the role of "scrutineer of officialdom and elected representatives." (Street, 2001: 151) McQuail (1994: 131) here pointed to the 'right to be irresponsible': "to show no respect for authority, privacy or decency, the possibility for which can be one small safeguard against conspiracies of the rich and powerful […]." As these citations also illustrate, the watchdog role is aimed, for a significant part, at institutionalized politics, but this is not an exclusive focus, as the watchdog role can also apply to, for instance, dysfunctions in the realm of business.

In particular investigative journalism has been seen spearheading the materializations of the watchdog role. Forbes (2005: 1), in his discussions on the definitions of investigative journalism, pointed to the distinction between "general investigations in areas such as consumer issues, and more serious investigations conducted into, for example, nepotism, corruption, smuggling or corporate malfeasance," with the latter qualifying as investigative journalism. Umejei and Suleiman (2021: 205) used a similar negative-relationist strategy to differentiate investigative journalism from 'other' journalistic practices, as the former is characterized by "reporter initiative, methodological rigour in collecting evidence and writing up the story and the impact of the story in instigating reforms." Even when there is considerable discussion on the status of investigative journalism, there are a considerable number of hopeful voices pointing to a "rejuvenation" of investigative journalism (e.g., de Burgh, 2021: 1), driven by new trans-media collaborations (Alfter, 2021) and online technologies that have provided additional resources for journalists to engage in investigative journalism, as is captured by the label of Digital Investigative Journalism (Hahn and Stalph, 2018; Carson, 2020).

It is important to note that the watchdog role is (almost) exclusively situated in the discursive domain, as it relies heavily on publicness. Media produce information about dysfunctions—sometimes after long and intensive research, which also has its material dimensions—but these signifying practices are then expected to have material consequences in other societal fields, e.g., adjusted voting behaviour, legal action, or alterations within the political field. This reliance on external responses is one of the weaknesses of the watchdog role, together with the vulnerability of media and their journalists towards external pressures. In several cases, political actors have attacked media and their journalists, either physically or rhetorically, as is evidenced by former USA president Donald Trump 'fake newsing' strategy (Gore, 2017; Benkler, Faris and Roberts, 2018: 105-144; Sunstein, 2021: 17-21), bringing in more antagonistic forms of conflict between media and political actors, and limiting media's capacity to maintain a power balance in relation to the field of politics.

Moreover, media have not always performed this watchdog role, which has triggered the lapdog critique. Gitlin (1991: 123), for instance, critiqued journalists, already quite some time ago, for “dancing attendance at the campaign ball while insisting that they were actually following their own beat.” Starkman’s (2014: 1) analysis—aptly entitled *The Watchdog That Didn't Bark*—shows how the “U.S. business press failed to investigate and hold accountable Wall Street banks and major mortgage lenders in the years leading up to the financial crisis of 2008.” Finally, de Burgh (2008: 3) was even stronger in his formulation, when he wrote that “the techniques of investigative journalism […] can be put to partisan, commercial or corrupt use as much as to right wrongs or overcome evil.”

In principle, the decentralized nature of online media also allows for citizen journalists (or non-professional journalists performing journalistic tasks) to engage in investigative journalism—and to act as watchdogs—more than before (see Atton and Hamilton, 2008), which does occur (Bruns, 2003; Allan, 2009). But in practice, the semi-publicness of online media has turned the monitoring situation around, with citizens being the one’s more scrutinized than being the one’s scrutinizing, as the political usage of data analytics (Becker et al., 2017; Ginsburgh et al., 2020) has demonstrated. Even though this changing relation between the political field and citizens is not a strong form of antagonism, the panoptic politics of observation and the potential forms of manipulation that can be derived from it, still weaken the democratic position of citizens.

6.3. Facilitating Societal Debate and Democratic Struggle

Media also contribute to democracy through the creation of a forum that allows for a “competitive exposure of alternative viewpoints.” (McQuail, 1994: 129) In practice a multitude of extremely diverse fora rhetorically grouped together, this forum (role) allows for the discussion of generally relevant problems and the cooperative search for common solutions to these problems. More closely related to the deliberative models of democracy, the forum role transcends the informational role through its emphasis on representing the diversity of—possibly contradictory—perspectives on particular matters and on the confrontation of these different perspectives with each other. These societal debates and struggles, in the deliberative model, ideally result in the creation of consensus—through “the unforced force of the better argument” (Habermas, 1996: 306)—although the more conflict-oriented approaches suggest that these (temporary) closures come through the establishment of hegemony, and the elimination of the weaker—not necessarily the argumentatively worse—perspectives. Whatever the approach to conflict and consensus in democracy is, rendering the arguments and positions visible, and allowing them to engage with each other remains a role where media are seen to contribute to democracy.

The (older) theories that focussed more on traditional media assumed—often implicitly—that the communication of these diverse perspectives was journalistically curated, with selection processes that were driven by a desire for objectivity and ethics, with its links to factuality, relevance, truth(fullness), impartiality, balance and neutrality (Westerståhl, 1983). Despite the importance and relevance of journalistic curation (or gate-keeping), these curatorial practices have been critiqued on several fronts. For instance, the news values behind news curation are seen to have a series of counter-productive consequences. Not only is there a strong emphasis on novelty and negativity, the forum role has been in

particular impacted by the articulation of balance as a dichotomized party-based (or actor-based) balance, resulting in pleas for more argument-based forms of balance (for instance, Carpentier, 2007: 166).

In a more radical fashion, the elitist nature of journalistic curation was critiqued by community and alternative media movements (Girard, 1992; McQuail, 1994: 131), who argued for a stronger emphasis on the interest of the communities they wished to serve, on engagement, social justice and subjectivity—allowing for what Manca (1989) called pluralist objectivity—and on a stronger detachment from the market (and the state). Theoretically, the resistance against the mainstream (media) has also been captured by Fraser's (1992, see also Downey and Fenton, 2003) concept of the counter-public sphere and the "proliferation of subaltern counterpublics." (Fraser, 1992: 69–70) This became even more important with the popularization of online communication, with Downey and Fenton (2003: 198)–and also Cammaerts (2009)–pointing to the communication and mobilization strategies used by extreme right-wing groups, concluding that "the Internet permits radical groups from both Left and Right […] to construct inexpensive virtual counter-public spheres to accompany their other forms of organization and protest."

The popularization of online communication, and in particular social media, has had an impact in this area as well, affecting the hegemony of journalistic curation itself. It brought Williams and Deli Carpini (2000) to point to the "collapse of media gatekeeping" and to the existence of a "multiplicity of gates" (Williams and Deli Carpini, 2000: 66). Much later—and expressed in a more careful manner—Vos and Heinderyckx (2015) argued that gate-keeping is "in transition." As Vos (2015: 9) wrote in the introductory chapter of the latter publication, journalistic curation still matters, though, also in relation of the media's forum role:

> "Journalists generally hold that news plays a valuable role in democracy by performing a number of essential tasks, such as reporting up-to-the-minute news, providing a forum where ideas of public significance can be discussed, and checking abuses of political and economic power […] The fact that others share in this responsibility does not detract from an obligation to do so according to the journalist's conscience."

One of the significant consequences of the ability to bypass mainstream media's curation is the increase of political actors that construct and directly address audiences through social media, even though "the opportunity to directly address large audiences through social media accrues to very few politicians and is an increasingly coveted goal for some of them" and "drawing large crowds online does not necessarily translate into influence." (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2015: 1029) The weakening of the hegemony of journalistic curation, and the increased circulation of non-journalistically curated content, has led some authors to focus on the more negative consequences. In particular the post-truth concept (McIntyre, 2018) captures the increased presence of lies and absurdities in the public sphere. Or, to cite the rather plastic subtitle of Ball's (2017) book, this approach focusses on "how bullshit conquered the world." This also connects to the cynical usage of non-curated online communications by political actors, as, for instance, has been the case with one of the former USA presidents, Donald Trump, about whom McIntyre (2018: 1-2) asked the

following question: “If Donald Trump could claim—without evidence—that if he lost the election it would be because it was rigged against him, did facts and truth even matter anymore?”

More positive approaches point to the still strong presence of journalistically curated content, also through its redistribution over social media, and to the increased importance of social media fact-checking by traditional media—what some have called the rise of ‘factcheck journalism’ (Lehmann-Jacobsen, 2022). This is combined with a critical analysis of the overemphasis on online participatory dysfunctions, which “produces the risk of discrediting the notion of participation itself, through its alignment with the dark sides of human behaviour.” (Ribeiro et al., 2019: 10) Behind these kinds of critical analyses lies the appreciation for the diversification and decentralization of the media’s forum role and the capabilities of ordinary people to evaluate media content for its truthfulness, but also—in a very Fiskean (1989) meaning—to appreciate the playfulness and parodic capacities of active audiences, who might not always take the seriousness of news completely serious, a process which might be more an enrichment of political communication than a problem.

6.4. Representing the Pluriformity of the Social and the Political

The fourth role of media in democracy is the representational role, as the concept of representation has also obtained a prominent place in different normative models, emphasizing the need to avoid misrepresentations and stereotyping. According to the older versions of these normative models, there is, in other words, a need for fair–sometimes also called ‘correct’–representations of more traditional social groups like migrants and women. For instance, in the (normative) social representational model, as outlined by Siebert et al. (1963), one of the core elements is to provide a “representative picture of constituent groups in society.” (Hutchins, 1947, cited by Siebert et al., 1963: 91) Even though Siebert et al.’s (1963: 91) language is outdated—and, at current standards, quite disturbing—their democratic motivation against stereotyping remains relevant:

> “this requirement would have the press accurately portray the social groups, the Chinese and the Negroes, for example, since persons tend to make decisions in terms of favorable or unfavorable images and a false picture can subvert accurate judgment.”

Despite the relevance of the discussion on representation in this social responsibility approach, there is also a need to broaden it, in order to better understand the representational role of media in democracy. One way to do this, is to distinguish between the realms of the social and the political, simultaneously acknowledging that these realms overlap, and that their frontiers are instable.

The social refers to the conglomerate of all kinds of individuals (including so-called ‘ordinary people’[16]), societal subgroups, small- and large-scale communities, criss-crossed by

[16] The concept of ‘ordinary people’ is often – following the footsteps of Laclau (1977), Hall (1981) and Fiske (1993) – defined in a negative way by comparing it to the elite, the power bloc or – in the words of Livingstone and Lunt (1996: 9) – the “elite representatives of established power.”

differences related to class, ethnicity and gender (among other social categories) and structured through diverse societal fields (including, for instance, the economy and the arts). The social also refers to the immense diversity of life styles, practices, affects, pleasures, and identities that characterize contemporary societies.

Here, the representational role of media, from a democratic perspective, moves far beyond the news, but includes all media content that is produced, ranging from hard news over popular culture (with its entertainment industries) to subcultures. The democratic-representational role consists of the avoidance of generalizations and hierarchizations, combined with sufficient attention for what Smelik et al. (1999: 45) called pluriform representations. This includes, for instance, the avoidance of symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978), the fair and respectful representation of misrepresented groups, and the avoidance and deconstruction of stereotypes, which includes Hall's (1997: 274) strategy to "contest [stereotypes] from within." Here, the importance of self-representation cannot go unmentioned, which has been facilitated throughout the history of community media, and—more recently—through the practices of online communication.

One particular area of the social that merits more attention is related to crime and violence. As Gomes et al. (2022: 9) wrote, crime news—and a similar point could be made about audio-visual (semi-)fictional crime narratives—has a strong presence, it is "one of the most popular and constant in the total amount of news broadcast by the media," which produces the risk that "the importance of crime in people's lives" (Gomes et al., 2022: 10) becomes exaggerated, feeding a culture of fear and anxiety. Hall et al. (1978) referred here to a deviancy amplification spiral, that feeds into moral panics: "Moral panics come into play when this deep-structure of anxiety and traditionalism connects with the public definition of crime by the media, and *is mobilised*." (Hall et al., 1978: 165—emphasis in original) As Mason (2003: 7-8) showed, this mobilization can occur through media campaigns, which is illustrated by the *News of the World's* "naming and shaming of paedophiles' campaign", which was instigated in July 2000, in the UK. This example also shows the processes of othering and stigmatization that often characterize crime representations (Gomes et al., 2022: 7-8),[17] simultaneously being "limited to the description of the event and immediate consequences, not focusing on critical perspectives or wider debates around causes, prevention, or policy." (Gomes et al., 2022: 10) Despite these problematic representations connected to crime, it is also worth noting the strength of the media's condemnation of—in particular—physical interpersonal and group violence, which also has a (democratic) protective component. Arguably, this is the more positive version of Hartley's (1992: 140) comment that

> "journalists are visionaries of truth, seers of distant order, communicated to their communities by a process of photographic negativization, where the image of order is actually recorded as its own negative, in stories of disorder."

The second dimension, namely the representation of the political *an sich*, including institutionalized politics, also matters significantly, where media have—arguably—an educational and a protective (sub)role to play. First, media have the ability to clarify the

[17] More emphatic media representations of perpetrators do exist, see, for instance, Reiner et al. (2003: 25-26).

complexities of democracy, with its inherent struggles. Through this educational role, media can communicate and contextualize the normality of democratic struggle, with its endless conflicts and attempts to reach a consensus, and with its hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects. They can also play this educational role in communicating and contextualizing the democratic struggles over democracy itself—as discussed in Section two—explaining the democratic normality over struggles over the balance between representation and participation, over the expansion of democracy to other realms of the social (outside Institutionalized politics), over the role and nature of democratic procedure, also in relation to human rights, and over the definition of the political community. In a more minimalist version, media also have a role to play in abstaining from the simplification of democratic struggles, and from the essentialization of democracy. Potentially, this educational (sub)role can—to some degree—counter the frustration causes by the unavoidability of democracy not fulfilling its promises (as discussed in Section four).

The protective role in this discussion consists out of the defence of values considered universalized, what we have termed earlier—inspired by Manca's (1989) work—pluralist neutrality (Carpentier, 2007: 165). The universalizable values that can be mentioned in this context are restricted in numbers: democracy (and resistance against dictatorship and tyranny), peace (and resistance against war and violence), freedom (and resistance against human right violations), equality (and resistance against discrimination), and justice (and resistance against oppression and social inequality). When focussing on the protection of democracy itself, we can return to Section four, which discusses the threats to democracy. Apart from protecting democracy itself, media can actively contribute to problematizing attempts to (re)centralize power, to too strong levels of non-participation, to attempts to close down the 'corral', excluding citizens from the political community and to the use of (political) violence.

6.5. Facilitating Public Participation

Participation in the public sphere is always connected with questions of power and (in)equality. Against the background of the rapid transformation of media and public sphere and its central integrative function for society, Krotz (1998, 111 ff.—our translation, emphasis removed) formulated the following fundamental questions about the opportunities for participation in the public sphere, which seem more relevant than ever:

> "[H]ow adequate [is] the participation in the organized public sphere that has been possible up to now as the use of standardized news and information broadcasts, and how adequate are the opportunities for participation in representative democracy under today's living, working and media conditions [...]. Citizens must be granted adequate information and participation opportunities in accordance with the state of social and technical development."

If we use Carpentier's (2011a) distinction between participation in and through media, we can first acknowledge that media facilitate participation *in* the field of institutionalized politics. Participation can thus be understood as a practice or everyday action that is exercised by citizens in concrete situations, under certain circumstances and for certain purposes (see Carpentier, 2016b: 77ff.). In this context, the term of participation refers to a

continuum of different forms, which can range from manipulated or tokenist forms (Arnstein, 1969) to latent and manifest, or minimalist or maximalist forms of participation, including types of self-governance (cfr. Carpentier, 2011a; Ekman and Amna, 2012; Carpentier, 2016b).

Participation in institutionalized politics concerns citizens' interventions in political decision-making, through (amongst others) forms of voting, voice, activism and involvement in co-decision making structures and political organizations. Moreover, political participation can also occur outside institutionalized politics, grounded in everyday aesthetic and social as well as community contexts (Hepp and Pfadenhauer, 2014: 247ff.). Media's role here consists of offering—curated or non-curated—platforms that facilitate this active citizenship—and that fairly and respectfully represents it, as argued in the previous Subsection. Here, mainstream media have struggled to involve non-elite actors, but "a series of genres and formats have allowed for a certain degree of participation by ordinary people," (Carpentier, 2011a: 102) for instance talk shows (e.g., the subgenre of audience discussion programmes, see Livingstone and Lunt, 1996) and the letters to the editor genre (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2006). Of course, community and alternative media have offered equally important—and more maximalist—versions of participation in the field of politics, through their strong emphasis on self-representation.

But media also play an important role in facilitating participation *in* the media field itself, which shifts the mechanisms of participation and democracy to a broader social reality, beyond institutionalized politics. Here, the world of online communication has offered a multiplicity of opportunities to "be your own media" (as the Indymedia slogan formulated it). Krotz (2007: 107—our translation) stated that "computer-mediated communication [...] can form a potential basis for new forms of publicity and political communication in the long term as a result of the mediatization process." Prototypical examples are the so-called blogosphere or other forms of civil society participatory communication on the internet. Again, we should not forget the more traditional community media, which have a decades-long history in generating maximalist forms of participation *within* the media.

Although research often acknowledges the existence of a greater diversity of media participation and engagement opportunities, they are still diametrically opposed assessments of these communication processes and their consequences. In Dutton's (2009) rather optimistic perspective, these forms of media and communication constitute a "fifth estate" or a "fifth power" in the state, which is slowly but surely outstripping the traditional institutions of power (executive, judiciary, legislature and journalistic media) in terms of their communicative powers. Also representative for this more optimistic position, Jenkins (2006: 2) summarizes the convergence of real-world and media communication processes from a cultural-theoretical perspective as a 'convergence culture', which, for him, represents 'the' epochal and thus society-shaping characteristic of our time:

> "Welcome to convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways."

This process of convergence is said to also enable a new form of participatory culture, in which the technical possibilities of the social web facilitate civic engagement and political participation in a playfully simple way, as they allow them to easily become part of everyday media activity (Jenkins et al., 2009). For Jenkins (2010), (digital) communication media and media technologies can, under certain conditions, function as so-called 'civic media' that enable participation in the public sphere, or "any use of any technology for the purposes of increasing civic engagement and public participation, enabling the exchange of meaningful information, fostering social connectivity, constructing critical perspectives, insuring transparency and accountability, or strengthening citizen agency." (Jenkins, 2010, n.d.) Bruns (2007; 2008) made a similar argument in his approach to 'produsage'—the fusion of individual use and production processes. He stated that networked communication on the social web and the self-organized and collaborative production of media content can be seen as nuclei of political practices, as they break up a mass-media compatible and hierarchically structured political public sphere.

However, more pessimistic voices argue against the greater power of new forms of participatory communication, stating that even in the seemingly limitless world of internet communication, strong concentration processes can still be observed. *In principle*, it is possible for every citizen to publish their opinion. But the technical structure of the internet, the logic of search engines, the individual attention practices, the increasing power of platforms such as Facebook and Google mean that a small group of companies have maintained strong power positions, and only comparatively little content on the internet is actually accessed by larger audiences. Within the framework of disintermediation, new competitors of journalism, and new intermediaries on the information market (such as search engines, corporate media, etc.) have emerged, who can address the audience directly through internet communication, without being dependent on the journalistic "pinhole" (cfr. Neuberger, 2009: 54ff.). This process has not only accelerated in recent years, but quasi-monopolies have also formed. For example, Krotz (2017) referred to the fact that in some countries, the majority of the public equates the internet with the use of a few platforms such as Facebook, Google and WhatsApp; and everything that is not displayed, shared, etc. on these platforms does not gain public relevance, at least not to the same extent.

In addition to these structural critiques, negative consequences can also be identified on a subject-related level—such as the increased emergence of personal public spheres. This form of idiosyncratic partial public spheres is characterized by strong personal relevance and/or expected follow-up communication. The increasing possibilities of personalization and individualization of information searches and communication can lead to highly selective individual and/or group-related information spheres, the so-called "filter bubbles", of which media users are not necessarily aware (cfr. e.g., Papacharissi, 2002; Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2001). Under certain thematic and socio-political contexts, these forms of 'simple' public spheres can very quickly attain the relevance and reach of 'complex' ones. The public resonance of the so-called 'ad hoc publics' can, however, also quickly decline again—not so much for political and structural reasons as due to the low audience attention span. The internet campaign KONY 2012 is a prototypical illustration of how the combination of considerable journalistic attention and equally considerable initial audience responses are

still subject to waves of attention that disappear just as quickly as they appeared, and that do not have any lasting impact (cfr., in detail, Wimmer, 2014).

7. Struggles over Media's Democratic Roles

Also media's democratic roles are not uncontested, and—as media are not outside the political—they too become implicated in the struggles over their positions in relation to democracy and the (legitimate) degree of their interventions. Arguably, the values of freedom, equality and pluralism play key roles in these struggles, as their discursive articulations and their relationship (and balance) remains contested. For instance, in contemporary Western societies, freedom tends to become privileged over the other value-discourses—this is why Nancy (1994: 68—emphasis in original) wrote that "Freedom is *not*": It has become so omnipresent and dominant, that it has no clear particular meaning anymore. This is also why Carpentier (2022) labelled freedom an empty signifier.

Still, also equality and pluralism are implicated in the struggles over media's democratic roles, which are also deeply material, given the threats, for instance, arising from ownership concentration for pluralism, and the importance of having a multiplicity of media organizations—discursive-material assemblages in their own right—to ensure pluralism. Also the processes of journalistic curation have, in the end, many material dimensions, with their sources, procedures and infrastructures. In this Section, we will discuss four threats, linked to how media pluralism and media freedom is organized, and how pluriform representation and participation is constructed.

7.1. The Organization of Media Pluralism

Pluralism is important in relation to several democratic media roles, including the informational and representational role. One aim is to prevent one-sidedness, which can lead to the narrowing of information, representations and discourses. This is particularly evident in times of crisis, such as the recent Corona pandemic and the current war in Ukraine. Information conveyed by the media, including journalistically curated content, plays a decisive role in the process of understanding events taking place.

(Journalistic) diversity is protected by a media system that provides as complete and balanced an overview as possible of the discourses, arguments and opinions existing in society and its groups. Plurality is a prerequisite for the media to be able to fulfil their public task of contributing to the formation of public opinion and will. Pluralism can be produced in different ways: A provider of journalistic services can be obliged to create pluralism in their own offer by presenting the different positions in their programmes or newspapers ('internal' pluralism). Public service broadcasters are, for instance, obliged to follow this model. However, pluralism is also present if many publications are offered on the market, each of which pursues a certain 'tendency' and thus offers reporting from a particular (ideological) dimension, but which in their entirety represent the spectrum of opinions in society ('external' pluralism).

One struggle in relation to the organization of pluralism is related to the ongoing, everyday reporting about particular issues. Many news stories involve actors, both from the governmental and the non-governmental sphere, who have particular interests, in having their perspectives communicated, preferably without contestation. Some actors have considerable influence to steer reporting in particular directions, which counters the guiding principle of pluralism. In other words, opinion power can counter diversity. This is understood as the ability to steer content in a certain direction by excluding certain topics and opinions while emphasising others (cfr. McQuail, 1992). At the same time, journalism has developed procedures to counter these pressures, e.g., check-and-double-check, multi-perspectivity, source diversity, and the right to reply. Even when these procedures have their problems, as for instance the critique on bothsidesism (or 'fake balance', see Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004) shows, they do offer protection against outside pressures.

A second struggle is more structural, as it involves the organization of the media landscape as a whole, and the impact of material ownership. It does matter who owns a broadcaster, a publisher, or an internet portal, because media ownership may be translated into opinion power. The translation of ownership power into opinion power—jeopardizing the autonomy of journalists and newsrooms—which risks reducing internal pluralism, combined with tendencies towards media concentration, which may reduce external pluralism, opens up an area of struggle where regulatory actors intervene to ensure desirable levels of pluralism, but also where journalists and editors put up fierce—and often invisible—resistance against these structural interventions.

But also public service media, and (non-commercial) community media offer a counter-weight to pluralism-limiting market forces, and contributes to ensuring media independence. In particular community media have offered individuals and societal subgroups a voice on issues that meet their respective needs and interests. They portray issues that may not be represented in the mainstream media, facilitating the inclusive and participatory process to facilitate dialogues within and across communities at a regional and local level (Howley, 2005). Moreover, public service media are particularly well suited to address the information needs and interests of all segments of society, given their aim to 'serve the public', to protect pluralism and to promote the awareness of different opinions by providing opportunities for different groups in society–including cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, sexual, or other minorities –to receive and disseminate information, to express themselves and to exchange ideas.

The popularization of online communication opened up a third area for struggle, where the voice of 'ordinary people' is articulated as more authentic than the journalistically curated voices. The entry barriers into the media are lower than ever in today's digital media economy–which has the potential to promote pluralism. At the same time, the journalistic mechanisms to protect pluralism are not always activated, and, through the workings of filter bubbles and selection algorithms, audiences might not be exposed to a plurality of perspectives. Moreover, new concentration processes have also materialized, not necessarily in very transparent ways, which opens up new struggles at the domains of regulation, production and consumption.

7.2. Degrees of Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression and media freedom are hard-won fundamental rights, but they remain objects of struggle. Freedom, as is emphasized in the liberal tradition, is always in danger of being unnecessarily restricted by states, companies, and other social forces. In unpacking these struggles, a distinction can be made between individual freedom of communication (and reception) and institutional media freedoms (cfr. McQuail, 1992; Garton Ash, 2016). Freedom of expression, i.e., the right of every person to form an opinion and to express and disseminate it freely through speech, writing and images, is a fundamental human right. If the dissemination platform of the printed or digital press is chosen, media freedom is also added as a fundamental right of communication.

Weaver (1977) takes a broader perspective by identifying three different ways of defining media freedom. According to Weaver's approach, media freedom can be understood, firstly, as the virtual absence of restrictions on the media by the government, secondly, as the virtual absence of restrictions on the media in general (i.e. neither by the government nor by other influences) or, thirdly, as a combination of the absence of general restrictions and the existence of conditions that ensure the dissemination of a variety of ideas and opinions to a wider audience (cfr. Weaver, 1977: 156ff.). Weaver himself took the first path and defined media freedom (for his study) as the absence of government restrictions. Others chose differently: Picard (1985), for example, chooses the third definition. Furthermore, he distinguished between negative and positive media freedoms, where negative media freedom can be regarded as the far-reaching absence of general restrictions on the media, while positive media freedom refers to the existence of conditions to ensure the dissemination of ideas and opinions. For Picard (1985: 48), media freedom consists of a combination of both types.

One area of struggle—apart from the struggle for autonomy discussed in the previous Subsection—relates to the degree of government intervention. Libertarian and neo-liberal voices argue for minimalist state regulation, using a free market discourse. In contrast, other voices defend and welcome these interventions. Picard, for instance, identified different types of government interventions, such as subsidies or price regulation (see Picard, 1985: 101ff.), and concluded that these regulatory measures can have a positive impact on the diversity of opinion, independence and media freedom (Picard, 1985: 148ff.). Also the creation and continued financing of public service media is a structural and important state intervention. Rozumilowicz (2002: 14) argued against the free market idea, stating that free and independent media "exist within a structure which is effectively demonopolized of the control of any concentrated social groups or forces and in which access is both equally and effectively guaranteed." As no rights are absolute, these rights need to be wielded responsibly, which is (often) ensured through self-regulatory practices. This also brings us to journalists and their professional ethics, including the work of the different Press Councils in Europe and the press codes they publish.

Besides media freedom, also freedom of expression is a human right that is essential for democracy. It is enshrined, among others, in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and in Article 19 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Freedom of expression protects the whole communication process, from dissemination to reception,

statements of verifiable facts as well as subjective opinions and emotions – for example in the arts– and material-symbolic actions – for example in the form of a sit-in. But the limits to freedom of expression are also limited, as we would argue: No rights are absolute. But this position, and the exact nature of these limits, is contested and object of struggle. Some, so-called free speech absolutionists—often based in the USA—reject any limit on free speech. In 1961, Meiklejohn (1961) published an article with the telling title *The First Amendment Is an Absolute*. The famous (legal-constitutional) discussion, whether a person shouting 'Fire!' in a crowded theatre is protected by the First Amendment of the USA constitution, triggers the following answer from Rotunda (2019: 319): "It would be a very rare circumstance that the government could constitutionally prohibit one from shouting 'fire' in a crowded theatre."

Others would take a different position in this struggle, and argue that there also are (and have to be) legal limits to the freedom of expression. In this position, these limits are related to situations where other people's rights become jeopardized. Still, there are a wide variety of areas to be considered, which includes more individual levels (e.g., threats, defamation and libel) and more societal levels. The latter, for instance, concerns situations where the human dignity of others is violated, e.g., the denial of crimes against humanity or spreading hatred against individuals or groups of people. Again, whether, in which conditions and to what degree these could and should be regulated, is object of a substantial political struggle, as the regulation of hate speech demonstrates (Brown, 2017a; 2017b; Brown and Sinclair, 2019).

7.3. Degrees and Forms of Media Representation

The democratic representational role of media—intersecting with their forum and participatory roles—is another area of struggle, for a number of reasons. On the basis of the equality argument, one could argue that all people and all social groups must be able to make their opinions visible, so that the different positions are represented and can engage in a societal dialogue.

However, this was (and is) by no means always the case. People are visible in society in different ways due to different social conditions, and as outcomes of different power struggle. For instance, their financial resources, their level of education and eloquence, their societal status and their expertise (amongst other factors) impact on the likelihood to obtain access to media representations. These factors also influence to which media representations people can gain access, and how they are then represented there: Gaining access to a mainstream media news broadcast is different from gaining access to a reality TV programme (even though the latter can also have political counter-hegemonic dimensions, see Salamon, 2010). For instance, Filimonov and Carpentier's (2022) analysis of Swedish television series on climate change shows the very different positionality of experts and ordinary people, where the former are represented as actors of persuasion and change, and the latter are the subjects of these objectives, where the former are represented as autonomous and the latter as influenceable, and where the former speak from positions of authority and knowledge, and the latter have opinions.

Also, the notion of journalistic curation implies selection, where criteria such as relevance and balance play a significant role in denying access to particular voices. The term gate-keeping is a metaphor that helpfully describes these selection processes, implying that not all voices are (or can be) welcomed at the same time in curated media content. This generates a tension, and struggle over whose (individual) voice can be included, which frustrates the right to communicate (see D'Arcy, 1969 for the original formulation, and Carpentier, 2017: 142-143 for an overview). This also motivates the search for alternative channels. Using a psycho-analytical perspective, Ribeiro et al. (2019) mention here the *juissance* and drive arguments to explain that participation produces pleasure, but is also a positive version of the Nietzschean will to power, that drives people to participate (also in the media field). This line of argument offers a sound explanation for the generation of alternative journalistic curatorial contexts (e.g., community media), but also for the bypassing of curation altogether (e.g., through social media).

Moreover, journalistic curation—driven by balance and relevance—has also had perverse effects, in structurally excluding particular societal groups, or in—often inadvertently—generating stereotypical representations of them. This brings us back to the earlier discussions on the avoidance of symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978) and the fair and respectful representation of societal subgroups. Moreover, analyses of media reporting recognize and criticize the contemporary media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979)—i.e. the way media selectively choose events and topics and report on them—and the tendencies towards the focus on scandalization and moralization on the one hand and personalization, emotionalization and intimization on the other. Through these processes, media audiences' need for curiosity and voyeurism is often served and managed, in order to increase circulation and reach (e.g., Strömbäck and Lee Kaid, 2008).

As a result, so-called 'bias' occurs. Here, we prefer to label this the structural occurrence of reductionist representations.[18] Roughly, we can situate the presence of these reductionist representations at the level of production, content and reception. But the nature of these reductionist representations, and their problematizations, is again object of fierce political struggles. For instance, in the case of migrant representations, we can find the strong presence of racist voices, who rely heavily on the deployment of reductionist representations of the other. Even though mainstream media also contribute to the circulation of these representations—through the politics of citation—it is in particular the non-curated online communication that renders these representations visible (see, e.g., Klein, 2017). To illustrate, we can cite Jakubowicz et al.'s (2017: v) opening sentences:

> "Cyber racism, the spread of race hate speech through the Internet using the World Wide Web, has moved into centre stage in public debates across the world. [...] Once considered a minor, if unfortunate, consequence of the freedom built into the Web, public concern has grown as those freedoms have magnified the impact of hate."

At the same time, these reductionist representations also become targeted by activist critique, who organize resistance against racist communication, but who also produce

[18] 'Bias' or 'distortion' presupposes the existence of an unbiased or undistorted world, which we believe is ontologically problematic. There are also alternative concepts available. For instance, writing from an eco-linguistic context, Stibbe (2012: 3) uses the concept of destructive discourses.

alternative communicative platforms, within mainstream online platforms, and through community and alternative media. Moreover, media still have to be able to play their watchdog role, and protect their ability to exercise their criticality, which might also provoke discussions about the impact on, for instance, subgroup representations. This interplay has produced an ongoing struggle about representation itself, which Jakubowicz et al. (2017: 196) summarized as follows, on the basis of their research in Australia:

> "The struggle over what best represents a 'true' Australian national identity is becoming increasingly visible in the digital realm. The spread of Facebook's social media pages has provided ideal locations for creative interpretations of Australia's history and identity to be constructed, refined and circulated."

These anti-racist struggles are also embedded in a wider societal process where the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994) has gained prominence over the politics of redistribution (Fraser, 2000). As Taylor (1994: 25—emphasis in original) writes:

> "The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being."

Taylor's sceptic tone already indicates that the politics of recognition is a site of struggle, in which media are also implicated. Media are platforms for these struggles, and simultaneously objects of critique, attempting to navigate a set of contradictory demands. One illustration is the contemporary debate on 'woke' in the USA (which has also settled in Europe), where right-wing voices accuse mainstream media of being hijacked (see for instance, Athey's (2023) book *The Snowflakes' Revolt*) and more left-wing voices argue for social justice (see, e.g., the *Stay Woke: The Black Lives Matter Movement* documentary, which premiered on Black Entertainment Television in May 2016). These debates—as many others—demonstrate how the notion of pluriform representations refers to highly contested representational practices.

7.4. Degrees and Forms of Media Participation

The notion of equality also impacts on the legitimization of participatory media processes, as all groups in society are supposed to have equal participation opportunities, also in the media field. From this perspective of democratic equality, it is important to offer low-threshold participation opportunities, providing the members of the political community with the opportunity to communicate. One concept that captures these logics is the right to communicate—launched by D'Arcy (1969), as mentioned above—and referred to by Jacobson (1998) as a third-generation human right (see also Dakroury, 2009; Fisher and Harms, 1982; Padovani and Calabrese, 2014; Servaes, 1998). And media have the infrastructure that allows for this "right to know and speak" (Miller, 2007) to materialize.

Empirical research on media participation is characterized by analytically differentiated views (e.g., Carpentier and Dahlgren, 2011; Curran et al., 2012; Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013; Kaun et al., 2016). Hence, although participation and engagement can be researched as a *case sui generis*, it sharpens the blurred picture to contextualize media participation in the light of current processes of change of mediatization and digitalization (Dahlgren and Alvares, 2013; Hepp and Krotz, 2014).

By introducing the term media participation, Carpentier (2011a) took up this media aspect, focussing the discussion specifically on the constitutive role of media (of all kinds) in enhancing citizenship and participation. Here, we need to return to Carpentier's (2011a) distinction between participation *through* and participation *in* the media. The former describes the possibilities for participation in public debates and for self-representation in a variety of publics that characterise the social. The media sphere becomes the place where citizens can express their voices and share experiences with each other. Media can thus be understood as a sphere for deliberation as well as conflictual negotiation that does not have consensus as its end point.

Even though the term 'Facebook revolution' is problematic because of its technological determinist and symptomist (see Williams, 1990) connotation,[19] contemporary media do structurally contribute to participation in the political field, as Hepp (2012, our translation) illustrates:

> "It is not the social web that leads to something. Rather, it is the people on the streets, who articulate [...] since Seattle and the globalization-critical movement protest that followed Genoa in Germany. But what has changed is that these protests on the streets are comprehensively mediated – permeated for the media as well as by them. Digital media, which is always accessible through mobile phones, is certainly playing a role: People in the streets are organizing their protests via Facebook, tweeting the most important events and communicating continuously through SMS to avoid the police."

Participation *in* the media, on the other hand, aims at participation in the production process of media content (content-related participation), but also in organizational decision-making contexts of the media (structural participation). Carpentier mentions the participation of audience members in decision-making bodies of public broadcasters or newspapers as an example. In addition to this form of structural participation, participation in the media also describes the endeavour to participate in discursive circulation with the help of self-produced media content. This can take place both through individual initiatives by citizens and in collective form. As we already mentioned, traditional media have always sought to integrate the audience into the production process (e.g., in talk shows), but Carpentier has argued that community and alternative media have nevertheless been much more successful in organizing more maximalist forms of participation.

[19] As mentioned before, media cannot be restricted to their technological nature, but this intersects with their social use (Splichal, 2009, 400ff., see also Lazer, 2015, for a current case study on algorithms).

Despite the importance of the media's participatory role, participation in and through the media remain a site of struggle, in particular over the intensity of the participatory practices, whether they are more minimalist or more maximalist. Part of this discussion is situated at the rhetorical level itself, whether participation is defined as 'taking part', or whether it is seen as 'sharing power' (Carpentier, 2017: 87ff.). When participation becomes conflated with interaction—as arguably happens in the former definition—then almost everything becomes participation, which often legitimates shying away from the more radical maximalist versions of participation. As Carpentier (2017: 90-91) wrote, more minimalist versions of participation tend to protect the power positions of privileged (elite) actors, to the detriment of non-privileged (non-elite) actors, without totally excluding the latter. In contrast, more maximalist versions of participation strive for a full power equilibrium between all actors (which protects the non-privileged actors). We can distinguish between more minimalist forms of media participation, where media professionals retain strong control over process and outcome, and maximalist forms, where the power relations between the different actors that are part of the decision-making process, including (semi-)professionals and non-privileged groups, are balanced.

This difference between minimalist and maximalist participation is not a dichotomy, but a dimension, with many in-between positions. This is where the notion of participatory intensity comes in, referring to the position(s) of the participatory process on the minimalist/maximalist dimension. Here, we should keep in mind that these participatory intensities can change over time (as they are an object of societal struggle), but several components within one process can sometimes also yield differences (see Carpentier, 2016b). And, maximalist participation plays a significant role in contemporary Western societies as a utopian horizon but is rather difficult to achieve and even more difficult to sustain (Carpentier, 2014).

Different media have different participatory affordances, which are part of these struggles over participation. The creation of community and alternative media can explicitly be seen as interventions in these struggles, as they contested the privileged position of the media professional and subscribed expertise to 'ordinary' media producers. One of the clearest examples of these articulations can be found in the introduction to Girard's (1992: 2) *A Passion for Radio*, where he formulated the following answer to the question:

> "[…] a passion for [community] radio?: The answer to that question can be found in a third type of radio—an alternative to commercial and state radio. Often referred to as community radio, its most distinguishing characteristic is its commitment to community participation at all levels. While listeners of commercial radio are able to participate in the programming in limited ways—via open line telephone shows or by requesting a favourite song, for example—community radio listeners are the producers, managers, directors and even owners of the stations."

Online media generated a new layer of media participation, where self-publishing became significantly easier. Here we can see the three processes of continuation, transformation, and replacement of traditional media participation (see Wimmer, 2014) at work. These processes have contributed to a significant increase of both the sub-political and the subcultural constitution of the public sphere. In addition to the increase of possibilities and

forms of participation that digital media technologies provide, they are also instigators of changing relationships between politics and citizens, between media institutions and their audience, or even between media content and their users. This transformation does not only affect the media sphere, but it can also be seen in all areas of society (especially in the political system). Online media are no longer 'anywhere out there' but, 'right among us' (Deuze, 2023), because audiences are appropriating them into their everyday life quicker and more expansively than ever before.

Still, the dominance of online communication by a few large conglomerates is a substantial intervention in the struggle over participatory intensities as well. One element is that participation *in* social media organizations is (very) minimalist. Moreover, participation is been transformed into a form of labour, which, as 'free labour', 'digital labour' or 'immaterial labour' is a fundamental part of late capitalist societies and contributes to the creation of value, as it is addressed from a critical, predominantly Marxist perspective (Fuchs, 2010; 2013). Beneficiaries of user-generated content, apart from other users, are above all the companies that operate online platforms, such as Facebook Inc. or Google Inc., as these user activities generate profits for these companies through advertising revenue (van Dijck and Nieborg, 2009), often at the expense of the privacy of users (and their sometimes sensitive data). The supposedly emancipatory moments linked to the participation of users are ultimately contrasted with the control exercised by the platforms. As a consequence, when discussing user-generated content, one must speak of heterogeneous power relations and practices that arise between users and companies, and not per se of empowerment only (van Dijck, 2009).

A final struggle involves the uptake of participatory opportunities. Research on the acceptance and use of the more intensive participation procedures shows that, in general, the extension of participation opportunities, beyond the right to vote, is used especially by resource-rich sections of the population, i.e., by people who have, for example, financial capital, free time or a high level of education (e.g., van Ingen and van der Meer, 2011). This also tends to apply to media participation in general. The expansion of media participation opportunities alone does not automatically lead to broader political participation, as participation in digital protest activities is not always indicative of intense political mobilization (as the term 'slacktivism' indicates). Moreover, large parts of the population are left behind, hampered by digital divides[20] and despite attempts to mobilize them. Even the digital transformation of participation opportunities does not completely reduce this effect. Here, too, there are major differences in acceptance and use, even though digital formats are often more inclusive in terms of time allocation, cost, or accessibility. At the same time, care is needed, as according to Dahlgren (2004: 7), the political interest of most individuals has not been erased, rather, their understanding of politics merely shifted and "[they] developed other modes of political engagement." Hence, especially among young individuals, a different political awareness and understanding of participation is observable through their media practices (e.g., Bennett, 2008; Olsson and Dahlgren, 2010).

[20] See Carpentier, 2003, for a critique on the (dominant articulations of the) digital divide concept.

8. Conditions of Possibility for Democratic Media

Media do not function in isolation, and in order to perform their democratic roles, a series of conditions of possibility need to be fulfilled. Sometimes these discursive and material requirements are taken for granted, but, at the same time, these (infra)structural and cultural components are indispensable. In the case of resources, we move into the material realm, with a discussion on the role of technology, but also the organizational infrastructures that harbour them. A similar point can be made for the regulatory role of the state, but here we add a discursive element through the emphasis on its legitimacy. Finally, the presence of a democratic media culture, as a condition of possibility, brings in an even stronger discursive component.

8.1. Resources: Communication Technologies and Infrastructures

Media have always been closely linked to technical developments, with their particular affordances (Norman, 1988), which play a crucial role—as conditions of possibility—in allowing and disallowing media's democratic roles. Still, we should be careful to not isolate technology from the societies in which it is embedded. Stiegler's (1998: 82) brief definition of technology, as "organized inorganic matter", already gives a first idea about how broad the field of technology is, but also how it intersects with human activity. Another example is Derry and Williams's (1970: 3) definition of technology as "that bewilderingly varied body of knowledge and devices by which man progressively masters his natural environment […]." Technology—in the media field—can thus be understood as an enabler that has significantly expanded the possibilities of conception, production, bundling, distribution and reception of media content and media products (multimedia, ubiquitous, cross-device or non-linear use of media content may be mentioned as only a few examples), but it is not outside the societal context with, for instance, its skills, knowledges and organizations. Volti's (2006: 6) definition of technology places even more emphasis on this societal component, when he wrote that technology is "a system that uses knowledge and organization to produce objects and techniques for the attainment [of] specific goals." He continued by emphasizing the embeddedness of technology in the social: "New technologies brings changes to many aspects of society, while at the same time social forces do much to stimulate and shape these technologies." (Volti, 2006: 272) As Broich (2015: 238) commented, we have seen considerable change in the past decades, at technological and infrastructural levels:

> "Technology has always played an important role in the development of the mass media industry, but it is hard to deny that the advent of the digital age has accelerated change and innovation in the sector and significantly altered the way businesses and consumers act and interact."

This discussion also implies that (media) technologies are not neutral: One example is Guins's (2008: 15) statement:

> "Neoliberal control strategies are enacted and mediated through a range of devices, techniques, and practices that seek to regulate media and the subject of rule

> through ‘empowered’ practices with media technologies. In doing so, a liberal humanist understanding of technology is upheld that relies on an instrumentalist view of technology that renders all technology as neutral means, or ‘tools,’ for the realization of some human ends.”

Media technologies are the objects of hegemonic projects that (aim to) fixate their meanings, and aim to normalize these always particular meanings. Here, the discourse of neutrality can be seen as a discursive tool to serve this post-political strategy. Media technologies are rigidly embedded in societal contexts, and in this sense, they are never neutral. But the identities of technologies, whether or not their identities have been rigidly fixated by a hegemonic project, can always become re-articulated. This implies that media technologies can become positioned and be used in ways that move outside the dominant (or hegemonic) definitions. From this perspective, media technologies are contingent and are open to re-articulation and reusage. Illustrations are provided by alternative and community media, which show that audio-visual media technologies can be used in ways that transcend the use made of them by mainstream media organizations. Media technologies might not be neutral, but their signification might be altered, pushing them into other (but still equally particular and non-neutral) positions.

Still, we should also not ignore the materiality of media technologies (or user practices). This could lead to the problematic belief that any media technology can equally serve any kind of purpose. Technologies incorporate specific codes that allow them to do specific things, and not to do others. As we already mentioned, they have what Norman (1988) called affordances, qualities that allow for actions. From this perspective, technology represents a constraint insofar as it prescribes and formats the design of value creation (cfr. Stoi and Kühnle, 2002). This means, for example, that a change in the Google algorithm—due to the market-dominating position of the Internet search engine—entails changes in the content and formal design of websites. With its technology, Google sets standards to which content providers must adapt in order to continue to achieve good rankings in the search results pages.

If we try to combine these different arguments, we can see that there is an oscillation of media technologies between contingency and rigidity, where the discursive context fixates the identities of technologies, but also allows them to become unfixed. Similarly, the materiality of media technologies allows many different (sometimes unforeseen) usages, but also introduces a certain level of rigidity, not allowing for other particular usages.

Particularly important for technologies’ role as condition of possibility is their embeddedness in particular infrastructures. Technologies are, for instance, also commodities, and their availability also depends on the economic value that is ascribed to them. Not very long ago, audio-visual recording equipment was extremely expensive, and not even considered consumption technology. The current lower access costs combined with the widespread use of digital technology means that it is relatively easy for anyone to produce and distribute content. From a more organizational perspective, technologies are integrated in organizational contexts, that, in turn, function in capitalist settings. This, in practice, implies that media technologies are embedded in economic logics, with their production and distribution costs, management and marketing efforts, and resource-

generation requirements. A few of the recent changes bear evidence of this: The 'long tail effect', for instance, now makes it worthwhile to offer niche products with low demand, as online provision and distribution costs for digital media products are low. Furthermore, digital content can be categorized and recompiled relatively easily, so that the content can be adapted to individual needs with little effort and can be utilized multiple times.

However, these economic processes of increased volume are contrasted by the tendency for concentration when it comes to content providers. Globally, there are only a limited number of large corporations that dominate the offerings and markets of the internet, and both regulate access to the net and structure the communication possibilities of users: First and foremost, there are the brands/companies of Google, Facebook, Amazon and Apple. Network effects and perception barriers generated strong market positions for a few companies and promoted concentration on the internet. Products and services from Google or Facebook benefit from an increasing number of users, which in turn increases the value of their products for users as well as advertisers. With the achievement of a critical mass, a spiral has been set in motion that further expands the advantage for the respective companies and leads to a self-reinforcing dynamic, where also public service media become increasingly exposed to hostility, as they are seen as an obstacle to market expansion, while community and alternative media are facing significant problems in remaining economically sustainable (see also Section nine).

Given the dominance of capitalist logics, a stable economy with its media infrastructures and organizations thus remains an important condition of possibility for media to exercise their democratic roles. Additionally, even though libertarian voices would contest this, there is a continued need for government involvement in limiting the monopolistic tendencies in the media markets, and for government involvement in protecting non-market media, either through direct financial support, as is the case with public service media in many European countries, or through regulatory initiatives that acknowledge and protect the existence of non-market media such, as community media. One example of the latter is the 2009 *Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the Role of Community Media in Promoting Social Cohesion and Intercultural Dialogue*, where the Council of Europe (2009) emphasized the role of community media to stimulate political (macro-)participation and enhance democratic learning.

8.2. Democratic Media Culture: Freedom, Equality and Pluralism

A second, more discursive, condition of possibility is the validation of a series of values, that together constitute a democratic media culture. When a particular society, or a considerable portion of this society, no longer accepts the core democratic values, also in relation to the media landscape, media cannot fulfil their democratic roles. In the discussion on threats to democracy (Section four) we already discussed the tendency of power holders to (further) re-centralize power, and to move towards forms of illiberal-democratic or authoritarian regimes, thus reducing the importance of freedom and equality. This is connected to (and supported by) the construction of the Self as homogeneous, and the elimination of pluralism. If we take for instance the work of Carl Schmitt, who contributed in providing a legal-theoretical base for the Nazi ideology (as one of the so-called 'Schreibtischtäter'), and

his critique on liberalism, we can find this rejection of pluralism (and celebration of homogeneity). To use Mouffe's (2005: 14—emphasis in original) summary of his ideas:

> "we need to part company with Schmitt, who was adamant that there is no place for pluralism inside a democratic political community. Democracy, as he understood it, requires the existence of an homogeneous *demos*, and this precludes any possibility of pluralism."

This more general democratic threat also impacts on the position that media (can) take, as media become seen as instruments for illiberal-democratic or authoritarian regimes to achieve their discursive-ideological objectives, as a contribution to their struggle for hegemony. This implies that values such as media freedom, media pluralism and (with it) the core idea of equality, are weakened and ultimately rejected, replaced by regime loyalty and homogeneity. Also in political practice, we can see that media freedom is coming under pressure—on the one hand for economic reasons, but also, and very clearly, for political reasons. In the EU, Poland and especially Hungary stand out. But media freedom is also under pressure everywhere where journalists are coerced and threatened—here we see unfortunate developments all over Europe (see Section nine). Similarly, attempts exist to limit the diversity of voices and (media) organizations in several European countries. When taking Poland as example, the 2023 report of the Media Pluralism Monitor places the country in the high-risk category for market plurality and political independence (Klimkiewicz, 2023).

Arguably, the existence of a democratic media culture is a requirement that protects against these threats. This implies that there is broad societal support for the (key) values of freedom, equality and pluralism, in their non-absolutist articulation, also in relation to the functioning of the diversity of media active in the media landscape. This, in turn, requires the consistent circulation and legitimation of discourses about freedom, equality and pluralism, validating them as societally beneficial. Here, also media organizations and related organizations such as journalists' unions, together with the educational, political and legal fields have substantial roles to play. Second, a democratic media culture also requires an active defence of these values, as there are frequent threats to these values. This requirement implies a willingness to act, but also the instruments to react. One example here are the European Union's response to the restrictions imposed on media in Poland and Hungary. Wójcik (2022) describes this response as follows:

> "Other than monitoring the violations of media freedom and pluralism in the two Visegrad states the EU's response has been limited to some action in the scope of the Article 7 Rule of Law procedure against Hungary, and a single EU law infringement action against the Hungarian government contesting the media regulator's independence and accusing it of discriminatory action following its decision not to renew the license of independent radio broadcaster Klubrádió."

Finally, a democratic media culture also requires the performance of these values, for instance, through the production of fair and respectful representations, and the avoidance of othering and stereotyping. This implies a living political culture in which all actors are prepared to take note of the positions of others, to respect them and to engage with them

(Gastil, 2008). The latter is important, following Habermas' deliberative theory of democracy, as communicative engagement is more than merely having speakers and listeners present. It requires an active engagement with the other, to trigger subject- and opinion-transformative (learning) processes allowing for an attempt to generate "intuitive constitutional consensus," (Habermas, 2021: 481) even when this consensus might always be imperfect.

8.3. The Legitimacy of Democratic State Regulation as Counterweight

In Section one, about the core components of democracy, we argued that in contemporary democracies, the position of the state has become hegemonic, and thus an indispensable defining element of democracy itself. In the previous Subsection, we already discussed the scenario where states—controlled by illiberal-democratic or authoritarian regimes—act against the democratic media landscape, but in this Subsection we want to emphasize the importance of the regulatory efforts of democratic states, embedded in the rule of law, in relation to the media organizations that fall within their jurisdiction. Our argument here is that the acceptance of these regulatory efforts—or, in other words, their legitimacy—is another condition of possibility for democratic media to exist, and to fulfil their roles.

The history of democracies is closely linked to the history of the creation of procedures that guarantee, for instance, the circulation of reliable information while respecting freedom of expression. This has been achieved through regulations for audio-visual and printed media that made it possible to protect these freedoms, whose application was accepted as part of the rule of law. In order to function in the long term, media also need the stability that the rule of law brings, in order to realize their objectives, whether these are reach, high penetration of the market or social recognition.

At the same time, the democratic legitimacy of the state (as regulator) is also grounded in the ability to show restraint. Partially, this implies the absence of direct interventions, replaced by the stimulation of self-regulation, and the respect for the organizational autonomy of public service media (which constitutes the difference between government/state media and public service media). Still, in the case of public service media, more direct interventions exist, for instance through the formulation of performance expectations, linked to financial support.

Finally, the rise of global media also necessitates the creation of new legitimacies. As Croteau and Hoynes (2018: 529) wrote:

> "whereas national governments usually create and enforce regulations, by definition, global media cross these boundaries (Sreberny 2005), posing regulatory challenges for national governments (Calabrese 1999; Price 2002)."

Or in Stein and Sinha's (2006: 426) words: "Yet, global communication systems challenge the ability of nation-states to regulate effectively and to exercise their sovereignty." Croteau and Hoynes (2018) argued that there are three reasons for these regulatory difficulties,

namely the pressure from global media conglomerates, the impact of global 'free trade' agreements and the "borderless nature of the internet." (Croteau and Hoynes, 2018: 530) These problematics take us back to the ideological struggle between the 'free flow of information' versus the 'free and balanced flow of information', with the latter defended by the Non-aligned Movement during the struggle over the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the 1970s (see The MacBride Commission, 1980: 36). Given the hegemonic role of the state, methods for achieving more global regulatory frameworks are limited in scope, though. Stein and Sinha (2006: 426) mentioned three: "the harmonization of domestic laws among nations", "treaty negotiations among countries" and "the overall development of global communication systems", but simultaneously stresses that "scholarship suggests that these policies require a socially agreed set of principles at their core." Here, in a different formulation, we would argue for the need of the construction of new legitimacies for global regulation.

9. Threats to Media's Democratic Roles

This Section looks at the threats to media's democratic roles and the possible implications of these threats for democracy as whole, which all have their discursive and material dimensions. Some of these threats are old, with some of the newer ones connected to the different—and interrelated—contemporary transformations and crises (see in more detail, Neuberger, 2020), without losing sight of the importance and persistence of the older threats (also in intersection with the more novel crises). The crisis discourse, in particular when related to the digital transformation of media, has been circulating for some time now. Ironically, the public sphere is not only the context in which social crises are negotiated (Imhof, 2011), but it is also itself considered in crisis due to the digital transformation. The list of symptoms is long; they can be interpreted as deficits in achieving liberal democratic values such as freedom (net censorship, conformity pressure and deterrence effects, limited data sovereignty), equality (digital divide), integration (echo chambers, filter bubbles), deliberation (hate speech, propaganda, polarization), truth (fake news, conspiracy myths) and security (cyberbullying, 'shitstorms', violation of privacy) (see, for instance, Benkler et al., 2018; Bennett and Livingston, 2018; Chadwick, 2018, Entman and Usher, 2018).

9.1. The Lack of Economic Sustainability

The way media are technically and institutionally organized in a capitalist media system has an impact on their capacity to fulfil their democratic roles, as their existence may be threatened by the lack of sustainability. Some media organizations, e.g., community and alternative media, which often function outside market logics are particularly vulnerable. Community media organizations—as non-profit organizations that still have to function in a capitalist context—need access to material resources for their continued existence, a situation that is in many cases deeply problematic (Myers, 2011: 18). Although they often function with low budgets, they remain dependent on collecting sufficient financial resources, which might complicate or jeopardize the realization of their participatory-democratic remit.

Similarly, public service media (see Campos-Freire, 2021: 132ff.) have also faced economic hardship, with their recourses depending on government's support and public resources. Herzog et al. (2018: 3) started their introductory chapter with the sentence: "Public service media (PSM) organizations across the globe are under pressure." They continued that public service media funding "decreases or becomes increasingly contestable," adding that "Financing public broadcasting has always been a challenging and often controversial issue for policy-makers" (Herzog et al., 2018: 3). Karadimitriou (2022: 41) made a similar analysis:

> "The sustainability of public service broadcasting has proved a perennial issue with challenges succeeding one another (commercialization of the media field, digitalisation of communications, long-lasting problem of excessive politicisation and, recently, the rise of platformisation of communication)."

Traditional mainstream market media are also dealing with sustainability problems, with decreasing advertising revenues as well as a shrinking audience market. The circle of economic losers in the 'digital age' includes significant parts of these traditional mass media. Not least the use of regional newspapers has been subject to a serious shrinking process for several years, which is not without consequences for the degree of local and regional political information for many (especially young) citizens. The dominant USA platforms, which follow an economic rather than a public welfare-oriented model, are seen as the main cause for this loss of revenue.

The internet is also changing media usage behaviour, especially among younger audiences. A migration from the traditional mass media to the internet and a turning away from professional journalistic offers can be observed (e.g., Klopfenstein et al., 2022). News and political information are increasingly obtained from the internet, and in particular from social media (Newman et al., 2019), which also produces a low willingness to pay for the use of journalistic content on the internet. While print capitalism turned the majority of the population into (potential) readers, the transition to digital capitalism is not only changing reading practices. The digital structural change has—also some time ago—reached the news rooms, which rely on the use of digital technology—not least due to increased competitive pressure and declining advertising revenues. Firstly, the form of distribution is changing in the transition from print to online media. An increase in reach goes hand in hand with a restructuring of the advertising customer segment. Secondly, this results in the necessity for newspaper publishers and broadcasters to adapt their business models to the digital market—mainly through product innovations such as the e-paper, or new (often more flexible) employment practices. Thirdly, it is not only reporting that is transforming, but the role and status of journalism itself also changed.

The difficult revenue opportunities are leading large media companies to turn away from journalism and to shift their activities to more lucrative areas. As a result, the economic basis of professional journalism is increasingly being called into question. Alternative forms of financing such as crowdfunding, foundation financing and state subsidies are currently being discussed and tested. However, it remains doubtful that these will be sufficient to save the substance of professional journalism. This process poses a "historic challenge" (Bunz, 2009) for journalism in its contribution to the public sphere. In response to these challenges, the idea of journalism is a public good, which needs public support and should

not be left at the mercy of market forces, is gaining strength. One example is UNESCO's (2022: 24) *Journalism Is a Public Good* report, which also argued that "fact-based information is vitally important as an essential service, especially in times of crisis." One of the answers the report gave to the future of journalism question, is the following:

> "An arsenal of policies and innovative practices are urgently needed to support news media. These include changes by news producers, direct and indirect public financing for trusted news outlets, enhanced support for public service media, tax incentives for non-profit news outlets, and a redoubling of ODA and philanthropic investments in news production. All such efforts must be accompanied by institutional mechanisms that guarantee the editorial independence of news media outlets and avoid capture by powerful interests. The successful implementation of these and other policies will work towards ensuring that journalism continues to function as a public good." (UNESCO, 2022: 43)

9.2. The Colonization of the Public Sphere

Centralization of power also impacts on the media field, and its potential democratic role, as control over these signifying machines is a vital instrument of power. Control over the media allows for more selective information distribution, for a watchdog that turns a blind eye, but also for the transformation of democratic media into propaganda machines. Attempts to gain control over the media do not only originate from political actors, but also from economic actors, for only partially overlapping reasons. In more theoretical terms (see Habermas, 1987) we can refer to these power centralization processes as the colonization of the life world—and more in particular, the public sphere—by the systems of the state and the market.

Media ownership in capitalist societies is often confronted with concentration tendencies, which might not only cause economic dysfunctions but also reduce discursive-ideological diversity, where the diversity of discourses that can circulate in the public sphere become limited. Papathanassopoulos et al. (2023: 58) suggested an increase:

> "The liberalization of the rules governing the media systems in general and television sector around the globe in the last three decades has facilitated, if not accelerated, the trend toward the creation of larger and fewer dominant groups in the entire media sector. As a result, the media industry has become more concentrated and populated by multimedia conglomerates."

Different policies exist to (attempt to) protect both internal and external pluralism, but this remains an on-going political struggle. Moreover, within media organizations, media owners have a documented history of interference, leading authors such as Schlesinger (1987) to talk about the micro-myth of journalistic autonomy. As Zielonka (2015: 6-7) summarized this: "Media owned by local oligarchs are not necessarily expected to generate financial profits, but to help their owner's other businesses and also to enhance their political influence."

Also the excessive control over media by political actors is a considerable threat for the media's democratic role, as the representation of societal diversity, the watchdog role, but also people's participation becomes curtailed. In a European context, these discussions are partially (not exclusively) connected to the rise of so-called illiberal democracies with more authoritarian tendencies. Voltmer (2015: 217) writes: "Populism, illiberal politics, the politicization of the media, and widespread attack […] journalism are recurrent problems that seem to prevent these countries from developing mature political cultures." Of course, in some cases, as the existence of media oligarchs in these countries demonstrates, political and economic control overlaps.

One particular case study of these dynamics of control relate to the internet, which is a significant case, as so much hope was placed on its democratic capacities. In the mid-1990s, ideas of a free, decentralized and self-regulated internet that would largely manage without state intervention were high on the agenda of socio-political debates. On the fringes of the World Economic Forum in Davos in 1996, John Perry Barlow, one of the founders of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, formulated a Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace with remarkable pathos and a vague "we", which linked the claim of self-regulation of the internet with a radical anti-statist position:

> "Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather. […] We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth. We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity […]." (Barlow, 1996)

A year and a half earlier, Dyson et al. (1994) presented a Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age, in which libertarian views of freedom and the open designability of the internet were combined more decisively with neoliberal market ideas and a technological-deterministic position, feeding into a firm belief of progress towards the demonopolization and decentralization of the economy:

> "In Cyberspace itself, market after market is being transformed by technological progress from a 'natural monopoly' to one in which competition is the rule. […] The advent of new technology and new products creates the potential for dynamic competition."

This mixture of liberal-emancipatory visions of design, neo-liberal market views and technology-deterministic settings, which became typical for the Californian ideology, proved to be an extremely powerful and stable narrative in the following decades (Barbrook and Cameron, 1996; Turner, 2006) - later seconded by ideas of a sovereignty of action and creative capacity of users in Web 2. 0 (O'Reilly, 2005; Benkler, 2006).

Today, the internet and the data-based infrastructures which are operating in it have indeed impacted on the economy, politics, media, and society—albeit in significantly different

directions than initially hoped for and assumed. The most striking development of the past three decades is the large-scale commercial appropriation and private-sector takeover of large parts of the internet—some refer to this process explicitly as the colonization of the internet (Fuchs, 2011: 318; McChesney, 2013: 97; Siapera and Veikou, 2016: 44). Driven by technology companies, especially from the Silicon Valley environment, this process took place largely unhindered by social interventions and governmental-regulatory containment, at least until the second half of the 2010s. In the meantime, the internet is characterized by a multitude of commercially operated platforms that offer specialized services and consumer offers (e.g., driving services, travel bookings, accommodation agencies, delivery services, music and video-on-demand services or shopping portals), but above all by a few social media and messaging platforms that are considerably more widely structured and now classified as 'systemically relevant', through which essential parts of online-based communication, opinion-forming and media are organized and structured today.

With their platforms, corporations such as Amazon, Apple, Alphabet (Google) and Meta (Facebook) today operate the essential technical infrastructures and services of the commercial internet, which are not only used by private users, but also by many companies and public institutions. As private-sector actors with quasi-sovereign powers, they control the central access points to the internet, structure and observe users' possibilities of movement, filter and curate content, information flows and discussions on their platforms. As economic actors, they coordinate markets and mediate working relationships, work on the most seamless possible observation, processing, and valorization of the data traces that users leave behind on the internet. They have thus set in motion a process of measuring and commodifying social behavioural traces and relationships (Zuboff, 2019).

The technical digitization and institutionalization process of platforms has consequences for journalism: It influences intra- and intermedial competition, for example between the written press and public broadcasting. Empirically observable is a change in the importance and tendential loss of the journalistic media (see the previous Subsection). In addition, adaptation processes to platform logics can be observed. The institutionalization process of the platforms has also had a considerable influence on the norms and rules of the communication and knowledge order as well as the communication culture of society.

Until the second half of the 2010s, the public and the political field hardly reflected on these successive developments in the direction of colonization, privatization, commercialization and platformization of the internet (van Dijck et al., 2018), with all their consequences for the economy and society, and they were extremely late in entering the stage with their own initiatives for a stronger regulatory framework for the large platforms and the companies that operate them (Nadler and Cicilline, 2020; European Commission, 2020a, 2020b). As a result, these regulatory frameworks remain underdeveloped, rendering them unable to sufficiently counter the ongoing concentration tendencies, a situation which also further strengthens the threat of colonization.

9.3. Disenchantment and Lack of Trust

Non-participation is one of the threats that can affect democracy as a whole (see Section 4) as the withdrawal of a too substantial part of the population, or of some of its particular

subgroups, jeopardizes the very core principle of democratic participation (always in its balance with representation). As the public sphere is seen as a vital component of democracy, a withdrawal of citizens from the public sphere is considered problematic.

One type of argument is driven by the media critique on the cultural industry and the society of the spectacle (Debord, 1998; 2005), which argues that mainstream media are more forces of distraction than forces of democracy. Debord (1998: II), reflecting on his 1967 *The Society of the Spectacle* book, captures the book's main trust by saying it is a critique on "the autocratic reign of the market economy which had acceded to an irresponsible sovereignty, and the totality of new techniques of government which accompanied this reign." This type of argumentation is part of a longer tradition that accused mainstream media of playing an alienating role, dissuading members of the political community from being political in the first place. This was often connected to the (screen) entertainment industry, where the screen generated passive audience members, only fascinated by the pleasure offered by the screen and (made) disinterested in the world outside.

But also social media have been critiqued from this perspective,[21] as the commodification of their data is seen as alienating. For instance, Proulx et al. (2011: 23) wrote that "'the Internet is transforming ordinary users into active, consenting participants in their own alienation by consumer society." Also Stiegler (2009: 47, emphasis removed) made a similar point, when he wrote that "every epoch of grammatization—of which YouTube is one of the later cases [...]—constitutes a major turn in the cultural hegemony and the poisonous heteronomy imposed by the consumerist industrialization of culture." More cynical analyses of social media argue that the endless chatter on social media offers preoccupations that prevent citizens from engaging in other fields of the social, where interventions might be more effective (although—one needs to add here—social media can play a significant role in political activism), and they come part of the politics of distraction (Weiskel, 2005). In addition to these more media-centric discussions on alienation, there are also broader approaches, that point to the limited time and resources that citizens have to invest in political activity (mediated or not), because of alienation processes in other societal fields. If people have to be primarily concerned with survival, with generating sufficient income to pay for a more or less decent living, than entertainment might be very welcomed, while little time and energy might be left for democratic concerns.

Apart from these often deeply materialist analyses of (mainstream) media, there are also analyses that point to the more experiential dimensions. One of the elements here is the lack of trust in media (with analyses often grounded in quantitative surveys). For instance, the EBU report on trust and media (based on Eurobarometer data) shows the presence of this distrust, but also that there are considerable differences among the European countries. Countries such as Finland, Albania and the Netherlands have their 'low trust' category around 20%, while in the UK, Spain, North Macedonia and Greece, the 'low trust' category is over 50% in size. The average of the 28 EU countries is 40%, which implies that a substantial part of the European population reports a limited trust in media. More detailed analyses also indicate that trust in social media is considerably lower than trust in the more

[21] For a critique on this perspective on social media, see Reveley (2013).

traditional media, while the national parliaments and governments, and political parties in particular are even trusted less. These individualized (and aggregated) statements of distrust have also condensed into discourses of distrust, which offer frameworks of intelligibility for these more individual positions, and which can (potential) threaten the media's democratic roles. As Henke et al. (2020: 299) wrote:

> "The widespread public discourse about fake news, alternative facts, and an arising post-truth era seem to be a particularly alarming indication for an increasingly dysfunctional relationship between news media and its audience."

Related to the lack of trust, non-participation in the media also connects to disenchantment and powerlessness. It is a situation where engagement is lost. Coleman and Ross (2010: 154) discussed what they called a "glaring paradox of contemporary democracies," related to participation in the public sphere: Although audiences have more communicative possibilities than ever to "question their rulers; challenge official information; contribute to mainstream media; produce their own media and speak for themselves", at the same time there is an increasing disenchantment not only with politics but also with media–"feeling distant from elites; ignored by the media; unheard by representatives; constrained in public speech and utterly frustrated by the promises of democracy." (Coleman and Ross, 2010: 154) Carpentier (2018: v) pointed to a similar paradox, namely that of

> "the growing levels of participation in a variety of societal fields and the decreasing levels of control over the levers of societal power. […] I believe we need to heed this paradox much more as a paradox, as a seemingly contradictory statement. We need to take both components of the paradox serious, acknowledge that there is a history of coexistence combined with a present-day intensification, and scrutinize how they dynamically and contingently relate to each other. In other words, we need to gain a better understanding of how we now live in the era of the both."

In particular social media behold the promise to resolve these paradoxes, but similar as with democracy, this promise remains unfilled, which in turn causes frustration (see Carpentier, 2014). Part of the frustration is related to the limits to participation *through* social media (e.g., in the field of institutionalized politics), with, for instance Chen et al. (2019: 1670) pointed to the "discouraging effects of low-quality content." Because of this, "the information-oriented use of social media may not be able to promote participation." (Chen et al., 2019: 1670) They also point to the abundance of content and choice, which facilitates the avoidance of political information, as those "who lack an interest in politics can easily avoid political news and quickly get access to that which interests them instead." (Chen et al., 2019: 1671) Yet another frustration is triggered by the always lacking skills and knowledge to operate (social) media technologies, which also have their own agencies. Finally, the sometimes-unpleasant communicative styles used online, and the risks of publicness for those who actively engage, can limit participation through social media. But there are also limits to participation *in* the online media. Schmidt (2013) calls this a "participation paradox": Although social media may enable new forms of participation through offering citizens communicative platforms, they close themselves off from more maximalist-participatory forms of user (self-)administration or (self-)determination. Moreover, at a more global level, we should remain aware that the digital divide(s) has

(have) not been closed, and that for many access to, and interactions on/through, online media—not to mention participation in (or through) online media—is impossible.

9.4. The Transformation of Political Knowledge

Media, as signifying machines that contribute to knowledge production, are currently subjected to differentiation and re-institutionalization processes, which makes it even more difficult to speak about 'the' media as a whole. Numerous forms of media exist side by side. Different rules, norms and conventions apply to these different organizations, with some of them still in the process of being created. As we know from historical experience, processes of institutionalization are always conflictual, because the rules and norms that are eventually accepted must first be established. Political and legal decisions can contribute to this establishment process, even though also the many different users—society as a whole—impact on how the future media landscape will end up looking.

The transformation of the media landscape is also a cultural and political challenge because their institutionalization is a process outside the control of the state. Social media offerings are potentially global in nature, which means that very different articulations of diversity, freedom of expression and democracy are coming into play. At the same time, however, this also makes it necessary to reflect on one's 'own' goals and norms, combined with the demand to actively contribute to these global debates (Ash, 2016), with no certain outcomes, also not about the role that media can play in (European) democracy.

Furthermore, the (news) media are still facing an identity crisis (Carlson and Lewis, 2015), which also implies that many users find it difficult to assess the journalistic nature of content on the internet. For instance, on the internet, the politics of the number—where small numbers of people speak very loudly, claiming representativeness—make evaluating the weight of statements more difficult. Moreover, the boundaries between different realms have also become more permeable, blurred or dissolving: between large and small public spheres, between privacy and the public, between media genres, between journalistic areas, between news and non-news (Bengtsson, 2023), between independent journalism and interest-based advertising, between actors in professional performance roles and the audience (labelled 'produsers'), and between man and machine. This uncertainty increases due to border crossers, e.g., influencers or political activists who are difficult to classify. Wunderlich et al. (2022: 571) pointed to the research that labels these actors as 'strangers' or 'interloper media'. In some cases, providers try to profit from the credibility bonus of professional journalism by imitating its characteristics. Professional journalism then defends itself against the threat of loss of identity through stricter demarcations (boundary work) (Lewis, 2012) vis-à-vis (potential) competitors, but the unclarity—from a user perspective—remains.

Apart for the entrance of new human and organizational actors into the media landscape, also new technologies entered the stage, particularly in the form of artificial intelligence (AI), which refers to the "application of computing technologies to assume tasks normally associated with human intelligence." (Lin and Lewis, 2022: 1627) Broussard (2018: 32) provided the following brief explanation of AI:

> "The important distinction is this: general AI is what we want, what we hope for, and what we imagine (minus the evil robot overlords of goldenage science fiction). Narrow AI is what we have. It's the difference between dreams and reality. [...] Narrow AI works by analyzing an existing dataset, identifying patterns and probabilities in that dataset, and codifying these patterns and probabilities into a computational construct called a model."

When applied in journalism, AI can provide support with a considerable number of tasks. Lin and Lewis (2022: 1635) generated the following overview, which is worth reproducing here:

> "In the selection and production stage, good journalistic AI could aim to automatically produce news stories without ''objective'' errors or "subjective" errors, and could also seek to correct errors made by human authors. Additionally, such tools should more fully augment fact-checking, which up to now has been a heavily resource-intensive undertaking (e.g. see Hassan et al., 2015). Additionally, more accurate recording and transcribing of interviews should be achieved by AI—a feat becoming evident in many newsrooms (Marconi, 2020)—as well as an increasingly precise translation of foreign languages, which is an overlooked dimension of overall news accuracy. Even more, good journalistic AI should be able to help journalists identify meaningful historical context about news items by providing relevant material from the past—which reinforces the importance of preserving news archives in a period of rapid digital obsolescence (e.g. see Richardson 2020)."

At the same time, the generation of news texts through software produces uncertainty with regard to authorship, trust and quality. For instance, it is striking that in the above-rendered citation, Lin and Lewis (2022: 1635) used the concept of "good journalistic AI", which acts as a marker for quality issues, as "bad journalistic AI" (or badly used journalistic AI) may result in the publication of journalistic texts which are problematic in nature, which may in turn impact on the knowledge produced about a particular topic.

The comparatively decreased—although still highly relevant—importance of journalistic curation (or gatekeeping) in digital media intensifies the knowledge construction problem, as the degree of reliability of circulating information decreases. Opportunities for non-professional, anonymous, and impersonal communication are sometimes—but certainly not always—a gateway for insincere, one-sided, and manipulative forms of communication—for some it may not even be clear whether they were posted and/or distributed by bots or by people. This not only weakens the trust of citizens towards the political (in the broad meaning of the term) but also opens new possibilities for manipulation (with disinformation similar to black propaganda, see Jowett and O'Donnell (1999: 18)) and the circulation of erroneous information (linked to misinformation, see Applebaum, 2018).

In addition, the online offerings of even established media companies operate more in line with economic indicators than the 'offline offerings' and topicality as a news factor is gaining in importance over the criterion of relevance. Thus, the practice of systematic and regular audience monitoring—made possible by digital technologies—promotes a journalism that is less oriented towards what is important, but more towards what is new and appealing. This

can also lead to choices that are not necessarily conducive to democratic processes (Wolin, 2008: 7ff.), as the media's informational role becomes—at least potentially—jeopardized.

In a research interview, Van Aelst et al. (2017) discussed a series of concerns related to knowledge production. This list is quite extensive: (1) a decreasing amount of political news, (2) its decreasing quality, (3) the concentration of the media and decreasing diversity, (4) fragmentation and polarization, (5) an increasing relativism and (6) a growing inequality in the acquisition of political knowledge. The evaluation of these concerns—by empirical studies, focussing on the supply and user side—has shown, still according to Van Aelst et al. (2017), that (1) the relative share of political news in the total supply has decreased. In addition, individual user preferences have become more important, which narrows the acquisition of knowledge. (2) There is no evidence of a general trend towards a deterioration in the quality of news due to more entertainment. (3) How the degree of concentration affects the diversity of content cannot be clearly determined empirically. (4) News media are still the main source of political information; selection based on political interest is more widespread than selection based on political opinion. Both speak against fragmentation and polarization. (5) A growing amount of misinformation and half-truths can be assumed present, which makes it easier for users to avoid facts that contradict their preconceived notions. (6) The increased supply of knowledge and the possibility of active selection of knowledge tend to lead to a wider knowledge gap between different parts of the population. Van Aelst et al. (2017) concluded that the concerns they first mentioned are therefore only partially justified, but at the same time, their analysis also confirms the existence of a series of threats that might impact democracy.

All this means that it is becoming increasingly difficult for recipients or users to compile a comprehensive and appropriate picture of reality, dominant positions, and important arguments from the stream of communicative offers. As a result, the democratic role of media in providing information—with its potential to be transformed into knowledge—is weakened. At the same time, the opportunities for irony and playfulness, for parody and for not taking the political always seriously, and for participation, have still increased, which might also be beneficial, as long as the members of the political community have the media and information literacy skills to distinguish between the many different communicative styles and intentions, to appreciate and understand them and to navigate through these more complex knowledge environments. Without these skills, grounded in communicative ethics, a more postmodern media landscape, with its many contradictions and hybridities, might pose a considerable threat to democracy.

9.5. The Increase of Symbolic Violence and Polarization

Public communication is located at the very centre of democracy, and takes place in a variety of fields, including (curated and non-curated) media, politics, academia, education, activism, etc. Habermas's (1974: 49) concept of the public sphere—which he described as follows: "A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body"—is one of the many ways to describe and analyse the democratic importance of communicational exchanges. There are many different ways to structure these communicational exchanges, though, as we have argued earlier, including antagonism, agonism and synergism. In the case of antagonism, the other

becomes defined as an enemy, in need to be eradicated. Through this process, the self becomes radically differentiated from the enemy, and homogenized, united against the enemy (Carpentier, 2017: 172). Antagonism relies on the combination of material and symbolic violence, to silence the other, through the destruction of body and voice.

Particularly important in this Section is the notion of symbolic violence, which, as we have argued before, generates tensions for democracy as whole. But violence in its many different forms, and in particular symbolic violence, can also threaten the media's democratic role. Material violence within, or against media organizations and/or their journalists, in the context of Europe, is relatively rare, but it does occur. Several types of contexts can be distinguished, including terrorist violence against media, with the attack on the French satirical weekly newspaper, Charlie Hebdo, on 7 January 2015, as iconic example. More recently, Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2023) expressed concern about the safety of Russian journalists who have fled to Europe after the reported poisoning attempt of Elena Kostyuchenko, who had covered the Russian aggression against Ukraine for the investigative newspaper Novaya Gazeta. The coverage of the war in Ukraine has also proven lethal for journalists, with two out of three media staff reported killed in 2023, mentioned on the Safety of Journalists Platform[22]—namely the AFP Journalist Arman Soldin and the Ukrainian journalist, Bohdan Bitik, who was working as a fixer—having been killed in Ukraine. The third media staff member killed in 2023—at the time of writing this book—was Pal Kola, a security guard who was shot dead in a firearm attack on the Albanian TV Top Channel. Journalists are also targeted by other actors outside warzones, as the assassinations of the Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and the Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia illustrate. Both were investigating "ties between government officials and criminal groups" (Hajdari, 2023). Less lethal forms of violence are also used, with, for instance, the use of short-term (see RSF, 2022 for a Swedish example) detentions and, more rarely, long-term detentions, as is illustrated by the Spanish freelance reporter Pablo González, who, after being accused of spying for Russia, has been in pre-trial detention in Poland for more than a year (European Federation of Journalists, 2023).

The threat of symbolic violence to democracy and media's democratic role is of course broader, and its deployment does not necessarily exclude media organizations themselves. One of the areas where symbolic violence becomes apparent is hate speech, which Brown (2017a: 419-420) described as speech that is:

> "insulting, degrading, defaming, negatively stereotyping or inciting hatred, discrimination or violence against people in virtue of their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, for example; and that it makes a positive difference because such speech implicates issues of harm, dignity, security, healthy cultural dialogue, democracy, and legitimacy, to name just a handful of relevant issues."

Even when a substantial political struggle exists over the regulation of hate speech (Brown, 2017a; 2017b; Brown and Sinclair, 2019)—as we have argued before in Section seven—hate speech *as such* remains a problematic antagonistic practice, often communicated through

[22] https://fom.coe.int/en/listejournalistes/tues?years=2023

media, which threatens democracy through the practices of symbolic violence—aimed at subgroups of the political community—as it weakens the representational democratic role of media, which is aimed at respectful communication, and as it applies the logics of the corral and produces denizens. In the words of Waldron (2012: 4), symbolic violence undermines the idea that "each person, each member of each group, should be able to go about his or her business, with the assurance that there will be no need to face hostility, violence, discrimination, or exclusion by others." As Waldron (2012: 4) continued, hate speech:

> "creates something like an environmental threat to social peace, a sort of slow-acting poison, accumulating here and there, word by word, so that eventually it becomes harder and less natural for even the good-hearted members of the society to play their part in maintaining this public good."

Also harassment—again in its many variations—constitutes symbolic violence, even though it is often (but not always) more situated on an individual basis. Still, the pervasive presence of harassment, in particular in the online world, renders this world threatening and unsafe, which harms the media's ability to act as a democratic forum for the exchange of perspectives. As Nielsen and Fletcher (2020: 154) wrote, online harassment and trolling, "once thought to be relatively marginal and subcultural phenomena" but "now mainstream and widely experienced", constitutes

> "intimidation [that] will lead some to take a less active part in online public life than they would otherwise want to, a dynamic only further compounded in political contexts where people may feel reluctant to discuss news openly or share their political views for fear of social or other repercussions […]"

This also brings us to the debates about polarization. As Nathanson (2014: 58) explained, "Polarization occurs when large clusters of people hold views that are 'poles apart'." As such, this is not completely unusual in democracies, and not necessarily problematic, as the problem-transformational procedures of democracy might prove sufficient. But—as Nathanson (2014: 58) also clarifies in their chapter—polarization is a threat to democracy because also the mechanisms of othering become activated, with its cognitive and affective dimensions, and the other becomes articulated as other-enemy. This (potentially) triggers the use of symbolic violence, and possibly also material violence, as Nathanson's (2014: 58) example of the USA civil war illustrates. He explains the problematic nature of polarization as follows:

> "Not only are their views deeply inconsistent with one another, but they have intense feelings about their views and see no way to reconcile their views with those of people who disagree. Thus, they see their opponents as enemies and find it hard to sustain civility toward them." (Nathanson, 2014: 58)

Finally, symbolic violence is not only about speech, but also about silence. To return to Keane's (2004: 192) example of the underreporting of rape: He argues that while there are many barriers that prevent people to report being raped and there are "various weapons for breaking down these barriers", "arguably the factor that is most empowering of those who

suffer rape – initially encouraging them to do something about their suffering – is greater publicity of the crime of rape itself." Keane produces a staggering historical analysis of the silence with which rapes were met in the previous centuries, arguing that the partial relinquishing of this silence in societies with "communicative abundance have helped in the long run to erode the silence and coded symbolism that surrounds rape and other forms of violence." A similar argument can be made in relation to particular groups, where the symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978) of subgroups of the political community harms the representational rights of these groups, and weakens the media's democratic role. Tuchman's original article focussed on the symbolic annihilation of women in mass media, where she discussed three mechanisms: trivialisation, omission and condemnation, which intersected in generating reductionist representations of women. Similar arguments can be made for other subgroups, ranging from ethnic minorities to stigmatized groups such as sex workers and homeless people. In the latter case, Doudaki and Carpentier (2021: 222) summarized these representational issues in the following terms, but also argue that, and analyse how, alternative media—street papers—offer more humane representations of homeless people:

> "if homeless people gain any visibility on mainstream media, they are portrayed through mainly negative stereotypical representations, as victims, parasites or sub-humans. As they are often talked about, they remain deprived of their own voice. Nevertheless, alternative discourses about homeless people do exist. They can, for instance, be found in street papers that have been produced in many countries since the late 1980s and 1990s."

10. Summary and Conclusion

The relationship between democracy and media is strong, important and contingent. The diversity of media, that together constitute the European media landscape, has a central role to play in contemporary democracies. It is, in other words, hard to conceive of democracy without this media landscape. Arguably, that omnipresence also gives media a societal responsibility, which aligns well with the idea that democracy cannot be restricted to institutionalized politics anymore. The media's relationship with democracy shows that democracy spans the different fields of the political, including the media field.

At the same time, this implies that the political not only impacts on how democracy is articulated and performed, but the political also impacts on the media's contribution to democracy. Even when the very core of democracy—articulated as liberal representative democracy—is hegemonic (and thus strongly fixated), there is ample space for contestation, as we have shown in the part on the struggles over democracy. Put in (too) simple terms, we can distinguish between a model of democracy that is procedural, minimalist and limited in reach, and a model that is substantive, maximalist and broad in reach. Still, there are more dimensions that are implicated in these struggles, and there is a multiplicity of positions in this main dimension. It would thus be wrong to suggest that this dimension is a mere dichotomy.

Consequently, the contingency of the democratic also impacts on the articulation and performance of the role of the media *within* democracy. Here we can see how some of the

democratic struggles become imported into the media landscape. Some of these struggles are fierce: The illiberal-democratic and authoritarian tendencies imply that there are attempts to incorporate media organizations in their anti-pluralist agenda, also reducing media freedom and freedom of expression. The political projects that defend a politics of recognition, and that struggle against symbolic violence, collide with the absolutists' interpretations of the freedom of expression. Another example are the elitist-democratic discourses that aim to contain democracy to the field of institutionalized politics and that wish to minimize participation. This means that these discourses limit media participation to its informational and watchdog role (and a limited role of the forum role, as 'market place of ideas'). In contrast, more participatory-democratic discourses also aim to maximize participation in the media field (as they rely on the broad articulation of the political).

Acknowledging that some of the democratic media roles are not accepted by all democratic discourses, with the elitist-democratic discourse having a more limited approach, we argue that all five roles we outlined are important, but at the same time prudence needs to be exercised with in particular the representational and participatory roles, which can be rejected, articulated in more moderate manners, or articulated in more radical ways. Figure Two gives an overview of the democratic media roles mapped out on the democratic minimalism / maximalism dimension.

Figure Two: The contingency of the media's democratic roles

Elitist democratic discourse (Minimalism)		**Participatory-democratic discourse (Maximalism)**
• Informing Citizens	>>	>>
• Controlling Power Holders	>>	>>
• Forum as market place of ideas	• Forum as site for deliberation	>>
	• Moderate pluriform representation	• Radical pluriform representation
	• Moderate participatory intensity	• Maximalist participation

At the same time, not everything is struggle, and contingency is not a permanent state, only an unpredictable permanent possibility. One of the important theoretical positions of the discursive-material approach is that stability and fixity is politically generated, where hegemonic projects aim to stabilize reality. This implies, in turn, that not anything goes, as social realities have histories of fixation. Democracy and media have a series of core components, that we can safely consider as sedimented. They are grounded in a series of conditions of possibility, whose realization supports these hegemonies. Of course, both core components and conditions of possibility can change in the future, which will result in different political and media realities. Not everything is stable, though, also not at the present moment, as the discussions over contemporary struggles over democracy and media's democratic role show. What we have labelled in this book as 'struggles' are those contestations that remain *within* democracy, but there are also ongoing struggles—we call them 'threats'—that aim to push the current political and media structures and cultures outside the realm of democracy itself.

One of the still remarkable outcomes of the method we used, by looking at democracy first, and only then at media's role in democracy, and by combining core components, struggles, conditions of possibility and threats, is that we can demonstrate the degrees of overlap. Not completely surprisingly, the threats that characterize democracy and media's democratic roles are quite similar. Here we can see how interwoven the political and media landscapes are, and how—in other to protect democracy—holistic approaches are necessary. We also see how the struggles, conditions of possibility and threats overlap, showing, for instance, how threats act against conditions of possibility, and attempt to shift what has been sedimented back into the realm of political contestation.

Figure Three: An overview of core components, struggles, conditions of possibility and threats

Democracy	Media
Core	**Core**
Articulation of Participation and Representation	Articulation of Technology and Institution
Political Community (and State)	Audience
Liberalism	
Struggles	**Struggles**
Balance between Participation and Representation	Organization of Media Pluralism
Politics Versus the Political	Degrees of Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression
Procedural versus Substantive Democracy	Degrees and Forms of Media Representation
Defining the Political Community	Degrees and Forms of Media Participation
Procedures	
Conditions of possibility	**Conditions of possibility**
Material Decentralizations and Stabilities	Communication Technologies and Infrastructures as Resources
Legitimate State	Legitimacy of Democratic State Regulation as Counterweight
Active people	
Democratic Culture and its Values	Democratic Media Culture
Threats	**Threats**
Democracy's Unfulfilled Promises	Transformation of Political Knowledge
Non-Participation	Disenchantment and Lack of Trust
(Re)centralization of Power	Colonization of the Public Sphere
	Lack of Economic Sustainability
Closing Down the 'Corral'	
Violence, Antagonistic Other(ing)s and War	Increase of Symbolic Violence and Polarization

This book also demonstrated—in a subtle way—that the discursive-material approach is helpful in theory formation. Not only did this approach allow us to highlight the contingencies and rigidities of the fields of the political and the media, it also made us much more sensitive to the role of both discursive constructions and material (infra)structures in these discussions. For instance, in the discussions on the conditions of possibility of both fields, this approach allowed us to highlight the role of democratic (media) cultures *and* the importance of material institutions, organizations and recourses, not creating a hierarchy between them, but also understanding them as always entangled.

Finally, we need to point to one key position that is part of the discursive-material approach: Also academic theory formation is not outside discourse, and it is not outside the political. As the careful reader has undoubtedly noticed, we wish democracy a very long continuation of its existence, but we also hope that the future will bring—as Giddens (2002: 93) called it—a further democratization of (media) democracy.

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