Rescuing participation: a critique on the dark participation concept

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Abstract

This article returns to the in-depth theorisations about participation in order to reflect about the nature of participation, and to demonstrate some of the problems inherent to the publications that distinguish between light and dark (forms of) participation. The starting point of the article is a discussion on three limits embedded in the concept of participation. The first limit brings us back to the old discussion on the nature of participation, the focus on power, and what is included and excluded through its definition(s). The second limit of the participation concept thematises a series of distinctions, namely those between participation, its condition of possibility (access and interaction) and its outcomes. The third limit that (potentially) structures participation is the limit imposed by democratic culture. In response to these debates, the article introduces a more positive approach, that focuses on what has been ignored for too long, namely the reasons why participation matters. Here, the article provides a structural reflection on the contributions to the "Rescuing Participation" special issue, and constructs a theoretical model that consists out of three logics, namely a social, political and fantasmagoric logic, allowing us to better understand why participation matters.

Keywords

conditions of possibility; defining participation; democratic culture; limits of participation; participatory theory; relevance of participation

Resgatar a participação: para uma crítica sobre o lado oculto do conceito

Resumo

Este artigo regressa a uma teorização aprofundada sobre o conceito de participação, com o objetivo de refletir sobre a natureza da participação e demonstrar alguns dos problemas inerentes às publicações que distinguem entre formas de participação claras e escuras. O ponto de partida do artigo é uma discussão sobre três limites inscritos no conceito de participação. O primeiro limite leva-nos a uma discussão antiga sobre a natureza da participação, o foco no poder e o que é incluído e excluído nestas definições. O segundo limite do conceito de participação tem

como tema uma série de distinções, nomeadamente aquelas entre participação, a sua condição de possibilidade (acesso e interação) e os seus resultados. O terceiro limite que (potencialmente) estrutura a participação é da imposição da cultura democrática. Em resposta a estes debates, o artigo apresenta uma abordagem mais positiva, focada no que foi ignorado por muito tempo, a saber, as razões pelas quais a participação é importante. Aqui, o artigo fornece uma reflexão estrutural sobre as contribuições para este número da revista e constrói um modelo teórico que consiste em associar estas três lógicas, a saber, uma lógica social, política e fantasmagórica, permitindo entender melhor as razões pelas quais a participação é importante.

Palavras-chave
condições de possibilidade; definição de participação; cultura democrática; limites de participação; teoria participativa; relevância da participação

All of this leads me to a question that has been hovering around the edges of our two month long collective conversation – Is there such a thing as "bad participation"? Nico Carpentier's model offers one answer, as I understand it: he sets a high bar for what counts as participation, which remains an ideal rather than a fully achieved reality. Participation requires an equal distribution of decision-making power amongst all participants. My own work seeks to describe opportunities for participation across different institutions, communities, practices, infrastructures, as we transition towards, struggle for, negotiate around the hopes for a more participatory culture. Participation in Nico's sense is something we imperfectly achieve at best. Mine speaks of varying degrees of participation. (Henry Jenkins quoted in Jenkins & Carpentier, 2019a)

Introduction

Participation is a theoretical concept that has known fluctuating levels of interest and fascination, which can be, at least partially, explained by different historical conjunctures, and different waves of democratisation (Carpentier, Dahlgren & Pasquali, 2013). In the field of Communication and Media Studies, the 1960s and 1970s were significant decades, as the attention for community media and communication rights reached a peak. While the popularisation of the WWW in the 1990s led to an increased interest in interaction and interactivity, the shift to the second generation of web services (commonly referred to as Web 2.0) in the mid-2000s meant another push for the interest in participation, within the field of communication and media studies.

After more than a decade of a renewed fascination for participation, in its relationship with communication and media, another conjunctural change is in sight. Different groups in society have again started to problematise participation, for a variety of

reasons. For instance, some media professionals feel pressured to hail the public, without having the proper tools and resources to do so, and/or they are being confronted with so-called participatory formats which turn out to be little more than 'marketing', programmed just to fill gaps in broadcasting schedules or to increase audience ratings. Hence, as Rosa Moreno (2006) once highlighted, participation is still regarded as an "*affair*e technique", which implies that media productions tend to include interactive and participatory formats for entertainment purposes, rather than for enabling actual meaningful and public discussions.

Furthermore, the news format is high-jacked for ideological struggles (Silva, 2013), with a disregard of the value of truth-seeking, turning gossip into a political tool. Frustration also occurs when the outcome of participation becomes meaningless, because it is incorporated by powerful elites (active, for instance, in the fields of economics, politics or communication) in order to legitimate their decisions. Media companies struggle with their busy online commenting sections, as they witness their web pages being flooded with hate and prejudice, trolling and flaming, with users that speak more than they listen, frustrating the desire for rational consensus, notwithstanding high rates of public attention in these spaces, as Stroud, Duyn and Peacock (2016) have shown. Moreover, governments are confronted with troll farms and other organised forms of resistance to their representative democratic processes, which results in "the people" to be positioned as a threat to democracy, and not as part of it. And at a larger ideological level, the lack of trust in "the people's" capacity to engage in democratic practices is part of a shift towards an increased belief in stronger elite systems, and a recalibration of the relation between people and "their" elites.

This conjunctural change has given rise to a series of publications that thematise the so-called dark side of participation, and later, dark participation. Even if these publications do not always contain strong theorisations of participation, and locate the "darkness" of participation in a multitude of sites, they are an important symptom of this (upcoming) reconfiguration. For instance, Tzur, Zalmanson and Oestreicher-Singer (2016) article, "The dark side of user participation", discusses how the interactive components of websites increase user trust in these spaces, opening the gates for the instrumentalization of participation; Bouchard's (2016) article, "The dark side of public participation", focusses on an online public consultation on Canada's prostitution laws, and how it was used to legitimate government decisions; Lutz and Hoffmann's (2017) article "The dark side of online participation" constructs a typology of participatory practices, and discusses a variety of what they label as undesirable or negative forms of online participation, including destructive engagement, involuntary imposition, silencing and self-censoring, and exclusion; finally, Quandt's (2018) and Frischlich, Boberg and Quandt (2019) articles use the dark participation concept in – what can be considered an ahistorical – critique on grassroots journalism, linked to "the recent wave of populism in Western democracies" and "characterized by negative, selfish or even deeply sinister contributions" (Quandt, 2018, p. 40).

This article wants to take a different route and aims to return to the in-depth theorisations about participation – that do exist, as the opening citation of this article (from Jenkins and Carpentier, 2019a) illustrates – in order to reflect upon the nature of participation, and demonstrate some of the problems inherent to the publications that distinguish between light and dark (forms of) participation. Moreover, this article wants to introduce a more positive approach, that focuses on what has been ignored for too long, namely the reasons why participation matters. We want to argue that there is also a need for a much better developed legitimation of why participation matters, and what kind of participation matters, so that the notion of participation does not get buried under an avalanche of well-intended critiques. We would like to argue that there is a need for more academic work that protects, defends and rescues participation, and this article aims to contribute to this objective.

Defining participation

An obvious starting point of this type of argument is the discussion about the definition of participation. As it has been argued rather extensively (Carpentier, 2011, 2016, 2017), participation has received structurally different meanings in different theoretical and research traditions, which has turned the concept's meaning quite fluid. Arguably, two main approaches can be distinguished, which provide structurally different meanings to the concept of participation.

In the sociological approach, participation is defined as taking part, which results in participation being equated to social interaction. Depending on the field where the participation concept is deployed, participation then, for instance, refers to visiting a museum, doing sports, watching television, or going online, just to name a few possibilities.

In contrast, the political studies approach takes a narrower approach, defining participation as sharing power. This approach has its roots in democratic theory, as democracy is always defined through the tension between representation (or the delegation of power) and participation (or the exercise of power) (Held, 1996). But these roots do not imply that participation can only be applied to institutionalised politics. Arnstein's (1969) "A ladder of citizen participation" article, one of the key examples of this approach, deals with the participation of residents in urban planning, which still touches upon on institutionalised politics, but also transcends it. Her article mostly describes how residents are confronted with elite strategies that reduce their capacities to exercise power, but also argues to move away from non-participatory and tokenist participatory practices in defining participation. Other examples of this approach move even more clearly outside the realm of institutionalised politics, studying community media participation (Carpentier, 2017; Howley, 2005), participation as a transformative process in development and social change (Dekker & Uslaner, 2003; Tufte, 2017), participation in the field of NGO action (Oliveira, Duarte Melo & Gonçalves, 2016), patient participation in the medical field (Guadagnoli & Ward, 1998), student participation in the educational field (Taylor &

Robinson, 2009), employee participation in the industry and professional life (Pateman, 1970), participation in the everyday (Bakardjieva, 2003, 2012), in consumption (Hyman & Tohill, 2017), advertising (Duarte Melo & Duque, 2018) and in artistic production (De Bruyne & Gielen, 2011), to mention but a few.

The political studies approach thus immediately produces a distinction between participation and social interaction, where participation becomes seen as the equalisation of power relations in relation to formal and informal decision-making moments, in a variety of societal fields, including the media field (e.g., Wasko & Mosco, 1992). Interaction (and access) remain very necessary to achieve this rebalancing of power relations, but cannot be equated to participation. Access and interaction are thus necessary but not sufficient conditions for participation. Both access and interaction still remain vital for participatory processes, as participation requires to have access and interaction, but participation is, at the same time, more than 'mere' access and interaction, because of its focus on the redistribution of power. This theoretical position does not imply that interaction is socially irrelevant, on the contrary. Social interaction is a vital societal force, for instance, because of its capacity to generate social cohesion and community (Dekker & Uslaner, 2003; Tufte, 2017), but it also has to be acknowledged that social interaction is not always socially benevolent. After all, also war is a form of social interaction.

Participation and its limits

While the sociological approach constructs participation as almost limitless, the political studies approach imposes clear limits on what is termed participation. Discussing these limits of participation is helpful to better understand the problems with the bad/dark participation arguments. Of course, this type of argumentation only works with the political studies approach to participation, which is very much focussed on establishing differences between what is and what is not participation, for instance, thematising the distinction between the democratic practice of participation, and the non-democratic rhetoric on participation.

The first limit brings us back to the old discussion on the nature of participation, and what is excluded through its definition(s). For instance, Arnstein (1969, p. 216) linked participation explicitly to power, saying "that citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power". On the same page, she explains more in detail what she means:

> it is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216)

Arnstein's ladder of participation has three main categories (citizen power, tokenism, non-participation) and eight levels, and only the first category (citizen power) can be considered participation. Arguably, Arnstein's ladder is very much focussed on excluding what cannot be considered participation from the common sense *and* political rhetoric on participation. This becomes very apparent in the discussion on the category of non-participation, which consists of two levels: manipulation and therapy. Here, the objective of these so-called participatory practices is "not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable power holders to 'educate' or 'cure' the participants" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217). But the same argument applies to the second main category, tokenism, which has three levels: informing, consultation and placation. To take consultation as example: It is based on the invitation to people to communicate their opinions, but, for Arnstein, this level is "still a sham since it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account" (1969, p. 219). Even if one could argue that Arnstein's ladder constructs a fairly rigid segregation between participation and non-participation (see Carpentier, 2016, for a critique), her work still provides an argument for the claim that what is sometimes called 'bad' or 'dark' participation should not be considered participation at all.

This type of argument can be further developed by reverting to the core element of the (political studies) definition of participation, namely "the redistribution of power" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216) or the "equalization of power relations" (Carpentier, 2011, p. 354). First of all, these definitions point out that power itself – at least in its Foucaultian meaning – transgresses a categorisation in terms of good and bad, positive and negative, transformative and restrictive. Power, for Foucault, is productive. To use his words:

> we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative
> terms: it "excludes", it "represses", it "censors", it "abstracts", it "masks",
> it "conceals". In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces do-
> mains of objects and rituals of truth. (Foucault, 1991, p. 194)

But this is only part of the argument, as the focus on the productive nature of power does not imply that power's ability to work in transformative and/or restrictive ways is denied.

This then brings us to democratic theory, and the idea that democracy – with its redistribution of power – is based on the particular normative position that the redistribution of power is both wise and ethical. Here, we can be reminded of Dewey's (1888) early essay, *The ethics of democracy*, where he writes:

> democracy, in a word, is a social, that is to say, an ethical conception, and
> upon its ethical significance is based its significance as governmental. De-
> mocracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and
> spiritual association. (Dewey, 1888, p. 18)

Arguably, the core normative position of democracy is that the radical centralisation of power with particular groups (elites) is unethical, while its decentralisation is (thus) intrinsically ethical. Behind this argument, we can find some of the core discourses of the Enlightenment, with its focus on equality and fraternity (and sisterhood), that delegitimate severely unbalanced power relations. Or, in a more positive formulation, equalised power relations are considered ethical because they allow the people to gain and maintain control – to some degree – over the governance of their everyday lives, respecting their humanity as autonomous beings.

At the same time, we should not forget that the establishment and maintenance of democracy was object of intense political struggle. As Perry (1973, p. 87) wrote: "for many centuries democracy, as a word and as an ideal, was in disrepute because failures had convinced educated men that democracy was a beguiling dream whose pursuit could lead only to disaster". This political struggle was constitutive for the concept of democracy itself, constructing it as an equilibrium between representation and participation, with the exact nature of that balance subjected to continuous (and legitimate) political-democratic struggle. In practice, within the field of democratic ideologies, we can find models that pull towards increasing the weight of the participatory dimension (e.g., participatory democracy), while other models advocate the inverse (e.g., representative democracy). After all, "a well-functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 104) but, at the same time, there is a need for the establishment of a democratic hegemony, or, in other words, for hegemonising *the idea* of democracy as inherently ethical.

This articulation of democracy as ethical also impacts on its participatory component, as this component provides the ground for the normative defence and propagation of democracy. Even if the exact degrees and intensities of participation remain contested, the idea of participation itself is – within a democratic context – an ethical idea. And this renders the concepts of "bad" and "dark" participation inherently contradictory. Instead, the argument can (and should) be made that the differences in participatory intensities – ranging from minimalist to maximalist participation (Carpentier, 2011), or from weak to strong participation (based on Barber's (1984) distinction between weak and strong democracy) – obviously do exist, and are object of legitimate democratic-political struggle, but that the idea of participation, framed within and by a democratic hegemony, in itself is deeply ethical.

The second limit of the participation concept returns to its definition, and two key distinctions. First, there is the distinction between access, interaction and participation, which has already been addressed earlier in this text. If participation is defined as the equalisation of power relations, then a gap opens up between access and interaction on the one hand, and participation on the other. This gap does not discredit access and interaction, but simply defines them as necessary but insufficient conditions for participation. Access, as the concept that theorises presence, is vital for participatory practices, as

the latter require the presence of different actors (participants) in the process, together with the presence of mediating objects and spaces. The same applies to interaction, which refers to the establishment of socio-communicative relationships. Interaction is very much needed to enable participatory processes, as the latter requires people (and objects, and spaces) to interact with each other. But there are many forms of interaction possible, and not all of them are participatory. To jump a bit in the text, violent conflict is very interactive, as it consists out of the deadly interplay of bodies and objects, ranging from the battle axe to the ballistic missile. But it is not participatory.

There is also a second distinction that matters here, which is the distinction between participation and the outcomes of participation. Participation is a (formal or informal) decision-making process, that involves diverse actors in particular power constellations, that rebalance societal power imbalances. To give an example from an earlier research project on youth participation and conflict transformation (Yüksek & Carpentier, 2018): youth participation deals with inclusion of youngsters in a decision-making process that corrects the weak power base that youngsters have in society (often through the logic of ageism, that leads to the privileging of adults). By allowing youngsters to engage in decision-making processes at an equal footing with adults, this power imbalance is adjusted, and youngsters and adults find themselves in more equalised power relations. But the outcomes of participatory processes need to be distinguished from the participatory processes themselves, also at the normative level.

In other words, the outcomes of participatory processes are not necessarily beneficial or benevolent, even if the decentralisation of power relations is ethical in itself. It is not because participation is ethical in itself, that the outcomes of participatory processes are also necessarily ethical. Still, participatory theory and research would argue that in many cases, the outcomes of participatory processes are positive, at both the personal and societal level. The former includes increased self-esteem and self-confidence, skills and knowledge, but also status, while the latter includes increased societal involvement, social happiness and justice, as Huesca's (2008) research illustrates. But the beneficial/benevolent outcomes are not to be taken for granted, as participatory processes can also result, at the personal level, in frustration and personal conflict, in combination with inefficient decision-making, stalemates, and even full-blown chaos at the societal level. Even if the detailed analysis of the different possible outcomes of participatory processes is beyond the scope of this text, these examples illustrate that these outcomes are not necessarily ethical, even if the participatory process in itself is. But this also allows us to argue for the opposite: even if participatory processes can have perverse outcomes, this does not mean that these processes themselves stop being ethical in their own right.

The third limit is the most difficult and contested one, which simultaneously renders this discussion highly relevant, also in the context of the discussion on bad/dark participation. If participation is defined through a democratic lens, then democracy also imposes a limit on participation itself, where participation becomes impossible outside

the democratic realm. Of course, it is necessary to immediately add that also the democratic is not necessarily restricted to institutionalised politics, but can play a role in a variety of societal fields. One way of illustrating this discussion – as was done in the Jenkins and Carpentier (2019b) discussion – is through a hypothetical situation: imagine a perfectly decentralised decision-making process, that is focussed on how to murder an individual. Or, in other, even more provocative terms: Can a pogrom or a lynch mob be (considered) participatory? Instinctively, it is difficult to acknowledge the participatory nature of this process, which then raises questions about the ground of this refusal to accept such a process as participatory.

Arguably, this is not so much a matter of the outcome of the process (which would bring us back to the previous discussion, about the second limit). Instead the problem resides in the object of the decision, which is situated outside the democratic realm, in combination with (but not restricted to) the deeply exclusionary practice that characterises it. One helpful discussion in democratic theory deals with the distinction between procedural and substantive democracy, or the distinction between rule-centred evaluations versus value-centred perceptions of democracy (see e.g., Shapiro, 1996, p. 123). In the former case, a process is considered democratic as long as its procedures are. The deportation dilemma shows the limits of this type of argumentation, as democratic procedures can be used by a majority to decide on the deportation of a minority. That is why the substantive democratic principle is needed to complement procedural democracy, arguing that democracy is (and also has to be) characterised by the respect for a set of core values, in particular human rights. This type of argument can also be used at the level of participation, legitimating the need to combine procedural participation with substantive participation. Agonistic conflict (see Mouffe, 2013a) would still perfectly fit within this perspective on participation, but antagonistic/violent conflict then becomes irreconcilable with participation. And this brings us back to the discussion on bad/dark participation, as many of the problematic social practices captured by this bad/dark participation concept might not be considered participatory on the grounds that they are antagonistic forms of (symbolic) violence.

A positive approach: the importance of participation

Even if "bad/dark participation" is conceptually problematic, there is still a risk that the concept starts leading a life of its own, which, in turn, might produce democratic harm. This is, of course, not an argument against critique, but an argument in favour of critique that is theoretically and conceptually grounded. The previous part has argued that participation is intrinsically ethical, from a democratic perspective, and that the perversions of participation are exactly that: perversions.

Simultaneously, it is interesting to reflect about why the bad/dark participation concept has gained prominence. One possible explanation is that participatory theory has

insufficiently argued for the socio-political importance of participation, and has taken its ethical nature for granted. This issue, in its entirety, supported by this introductory article, aims to contribute to the remediation of this problem, by also offering a more positive approach, that does not only focus on the limits of participation, but also explains explicitly why participation matters.

This argumentation can benefit from a structure that Glynos and Howarth (2007) have developed, distinguishing between three different logics: a political, a social and a fantasmatic logic (see Table 1 for an overview). We should keep the post-structuralist and discourse-theoretical origins of this three-level model in mind, though. One consequence of these origins is that it is necessary to explain the difference between the three levels a bit more. In Glynos and Howarth's perspective, the political is the realm of conflict, contestation and power struggles, which is caused by the radical diversity that characterises our world. The social is the realm of the world where the political temporary comes to rest, sedimented in particular social practices that have become stabilised, but that can always be pulled back into the political. Finally, fantasmatic logics "provide the means to understand why specific practices and regimes 'grip' subjects" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 145). They are the world of fantasies and drives.

Logic	Argumentations
Political	The protective argument
	The agonist argument
	The human-rights argument
Social	The educational or developmental argument
	The integrative argument
Fantasmatic	The *juissance* argument
	The drive argument

Table 1: The logics and argumentations for the importance of participation

The political logic allows use to think about the relevance of participation from the perspective of the power struggles between elites and peoples. One traditional argument is the so-called protective argument (see Held's (1996, p. 45) discussion on republicanism), where the relevance of participation is argued through the need of protecting the people against excessively powerful elites. As the concentration of power is deemed unethical, undesirable and dangerous because its incapacity to represent the diversity of societal interests and the tendency to serve elite interests, participation becomes a necessity to protect the people. Strauss summarizes this argument as follows:

> political society fulfils its function through political power, and political power is apt to threaten the very security for the sake of which it was established.

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To avoid this danger, the majority must have a share, commensurate with
its capacity, in public power. (Strauss, 1978, p. 278)

A number of articles in this issue of the journal *Comunicação e Sociedade* relate to this argument. For instance, Rose Marie Santini and Hanna Carvalho's article points to the accountability generated through participatory practices, where the notion of accountability can be considered one of the key mechanisms for protecting the citizenry. Also Sofia Lindström Sol's article on participation in the governance of culture illustrates this type of argument, in the sense that one of the discourses identified in her analysis emphasise the need for autonomy of the arts field, and the need for the transparency of (financial) government interventions. Interestingly, the second discourse she identifies turns the table around, as this discourse claims that the arts field itself needs to be opened up for democratic intervention.

There are also two contributions in this issue that extend the (traditional) protective argument, not limiting it to the protection of the citizenry against a (potentially) tyrannical state. Maria Fernandes-Jesus, Eunice Castro Seixas and Anabela Carvalho's article offers a first variation of the argument, as they (implicitly) point to the crisis of representative democracy, and argue that participatory practices have a protective capacity towards democracy, protecting citizens against the political forces that wish to weaken, and/or dismantle democracy. More concretely, the authors write that "if practices of access, standing and influence are based on trust, openness, transparency and notions of justice they may contribute to the revitalization of democracy" (p. 75). Miren Gutierrez's article discusses the "datafication of everything", which poses severe societal challenges and threats, that originate from multiple directions and actors, not only the state. "Citizen participation in the data infrastructure" (p. 49), supported by "cognizant agency and data literacy as entry points" (p. 49) offers this protective capacity.

The agonist argument is a variation of the protective argument, where participation is seen to allow for the diversity of voices to be expressed and heard, facilitating their (non-violent) confrontation and providing people with the opportunities for dialogue and debate. One key idea here, that is important to repeat, is that also democratic environments are characterised by conflict. To quote Mouffe (2013b, p. 185): "the specificity of modern democracy is precisely its recognition and legitimation of conflict; in democratic societies, therefore, conflict cannot and should not be eradicated". At the same time, "democratic politics requires" agonism, which implies "that the others be seen not as enemies to be destroyed but as adversaries whose ideas should be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas will never be questioned" (Mouffe, 2013b, p. 185).

Rodrigo Lacerda's article in the issue is an original illustration of the agonist argument, as he focusses on the activism of ethnic groups in relation to a heritage site in São Miguel (Brazil). As the author writes, the article is centred around the "Guarani ontology and cosmology" and reports a case of participation (and agency) of a hybrid form – "in which humans, nonhumans, and things participated in a more dialogic democracy" (p.

160) – that led to the official recognition of the ruins as historical and sacred ground for the Guarani. Also Kurniawan Adi Saputro and Bari Paramarta Islam's article demonstrates the capacity of particular communities to communicate their identities and histories, through the use of participatory films, even though the authors also analyse how the mismatch between form/genre and community culture restricted the participatory intensities.

Anna Zaluczkowska's article comes closest to an explicit version of the agonist-as-diversity argument as she shows how different voices can enter a narrative, labelling it a negotiated narrative, which "recognises the ways in which narratives can be hijacked to promote a particular point of view and suggests that discursive decision making as a central element of participative story making mediates the likelihood of this happening" (p. 203).

Finally, a third argument, within the political logic, is the human rights-based argument, which articulates participation as a human right. Participation in the field of institutionalised politics has been included in several key documents, in particular in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), from 1948, and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in 1966. For instance, article 21 of the UDHR starts with the sentence that "everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives", which is followed by the sentence: "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government". Article 25 of the ICCPR has a similar stipulation (see Fox, 1992; Peter, 2013; Steiner, 1988, for a discussion). The idea behind the articulation of (political) participation as a human right is that participation is one of the "moral rights that people have qua salient features of their humanity" (Peter, 2013, p. 2). Nevertheless, the human rights approach remains part of the political logic, as human rights are not beyond contestation in general, and the participatory intensities, or the degrees of power redistribution, are equally contested. As Peter (2013, p. 11; see also Steiner, 1988, p. 86) writes: "the take part clause is too vague to require any particular political system and would be satisfied by a right to participate in deliberative political processes". Moreover, as the discussions on communication rights (see Carpentier, 2011, p. 88, for an overview) show, there is also a political struggle over the extension of participatory rights into other societal fields.

The social logic produces two different types of arguments that show the importance of participation. First, there is the educational or developmental argument, which has its origins in the work of Rousseau and Wollstonecraft, and later Marx and Engels, but Held (1996, p. 45) also points to the philosophers of the ancient Greek democracy, and to the work of Marsillius of Padua. This argument highlights that citizens become citizens through the performance of participation. This is exemplified by Pateman's (1970, p. 25) discussion of Rousseau's work, where she aptly refers to Plamenatz, who wrote that:

> [Rousseau] turns our minds (...) to considering how the social order affects the structure of human personality, and continues by saying that Rousseau's democratic model aims to develop individual and responsible

> political action through the participatory process, where "the individual
> learns that the word 'each' must be applied to himself (...) he learns to be a
> public as well as a private citizen. (Plamenatz, 1963, p. 440)

Participation thus matters as its performance produces citizens that are actively engaged in society and derive happiness out of that social position (Oreg et al., 2011, p. 491).

In addition, participation also matters because, especially when it is located in institutionalised settings, it has the capacity to consolidate and stabilise society. This integrative argument is built on the idea that participatory processes create contact zones (Allport, 1954; Pratt, 1991) that allow, even imperfectly, for the development of mutual understanding between deprivileged and privileged groups in society. Participation enhances trust and attachment (Oreg et al., 2011, p. 491). Moreover, participatory processes also encompass moments of validation of deprivileged groups, whose voices are seen to matter through their inclusion into these processes and through the rebalancing of power relations. In a way, participatory processes can be seen as an antidote to Spivak's (1988) idea that the subaltern cannot speak (and be heard), as participation shifts the subaltern away from a voiceless existence, and from the identity of the subaltern itself.

Vitor Tomé, Paula Lopes, Bruno Reis and Carlos Pedro Dias's article in this issue is an illustration of both the educational and integrative argumentation, when the authors point out that the participation of students through media content production, also increased their involvement with others and strengthened their citizen identities:

> children's social participation has increased in and outside the school, in
> collaboration with the teachers, the families and the community. (...) In ac-
> cordance to the teachers' perceptions, interaction among formal, non-for-
> mal and informal contexts has contributed to shaping the children's prac-
> tices as citizens.

The third, fantasmatic logic, emphasises the importance of participation through the enjoyment that it produces. This *juissance* argument is in its core quite simple, as it stipulates that participation and empowerment generate enjoyment, which is, in its own right, highly relevant, at the individual and societal level. Of course, this enjoyment is not unproblematic, as it is bound to become frustrated through the re-establishment of (some levels of) elite domination. It is not only a matter of the "field of the signifier's order, of the big Other", which is "penetrated by a pre-symbolic (real) stream of enjoyment" but then "becomes enmeshed in the signifier's network (...) [and] the body is submitted to castration", as Žižek (1989, p. 136) wrote. It is also a matter to the Other-elite frequently re-imposing its authority in dealing what then becomes participation as part of the carnivalesque, with its idea of exceptionality. Situations of maximalist participation are utopian non-places (or better, "never-to-be places"), which will always be unattainable and empty, but their approximation still generates the enjoyment of empowerment.

The second argument within the fantasmatic logic, the drive argument, does not focus so much on the pleasure that participation generates, but articulates participation as a key drive. This argument can be seen as a positive version of the Nietzschean will to power. Nietzsche (1968, p. 404) indeed argued that the will to power is a key drive in society, but he articulated it as a will to dominate and control: "one must have no choice: either on top-or underneath, like a worm, mocked, annihilated, trodden upon. One must oppose tyrants to become a tyrant, i.e., *free*". Participatory theory shares the idea that the will to power is indeed a key drive, but would (obviously) rearticulate the will to power into its inverse, as a will not to be dominated and controlled, and as a will to share power. If we acknowledge this desire for contextualised autonomy, then participation again becomes important, as it allows the performance of this desire. And inversely, frustrating the will to share power as part of the exercise of contextualised autonomy, risks creating perverse effects, ranging from apathy to revolt.

Ignacio Bergillos's article in this issue, which articulates participation as a talisman, captures this fantasmatic fascination for participation. The article exemplifies this type of argumentation by reverting to the Lacanian concept of the fantasy, but also to the ritualistic and aesthetic attraction (as talisman) that participation can exercise. He concludes his article with the following sentences: "if we understand participation as a talisman, we can protect it, and rescue it, by enhancing the belief in its potential. Bringing back our faith in its power, we will be better equipped for the emotional and sentimental democracy (...) that we are currently living in" (p. 217).

A brief conclusion

This article expresses a deep commitment to the theorisation of participation. All too often, common sense vocabularies are used to discuss participation, which can be tempting, but does not necessarily assist in a better and deep understanding of participatory practices. Arguably, there is also still a need to flesh out some of the differences between related concepts, such as participation, interaction and engagement, as especially this route has proven to lead to more theoretical sophistication. After all, having all concepts mean everything at the same time does not seem to be that fruitful, especially when these concepts are then used to better understand contemporary conjunctures.

Without disavowing the importance of the sociological approach to participation, this article uses the political studies approach (which is highly indebted to democratic theory), conscious of the need to properly theorise and conceptualise participation. This positioning also has normative consequences, as the interlocking relationship between participation and democracy results in participation being articulated as intrinsically ethical, a position which allowed us to argue that concepts as "bad/dark participation" are more perversions of participation than anything else, and (thus) outside the conceptual realm of participation itself.

These reflections about the intrinsically ethical nature of participation also raise a question which is even more significant than pointing to the conceptual limits of participation. If participation is that important, how can this importance then be argued? How can citizens be motivated to acknowledge the importance of participation? How to render participation substantial? Publications about participation often implicitly assume that participation is beneficial, which has then triggered a number of authors to argue that it is not. Both positions are problematic. The former is problematic, because implicit assumptions work against the idea and practices of participation. The ethical nature of participation needs to be argued for, which can be seen as both good academic and democratic practice. This article (hopefully) contributes to this legitimation and clarification. The latter, arguing that participation is (sometimes) dark, is problematic as well, because it is built on weak conceptualisations of the concept of participation, but also because it produces the risk to become an objective ally of those voices that favour more centralised power relations, and to inadvertently join forces with the century-old attacks on democracy itself, thus contradicting and eventually annihilating the very core of participation.

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