



**THREE VARIETIES OF ASSEMBLY DEMOCRACY:
SCRUTINISING INSTITUTIONAL, ASSOCIATIONAL
AND FUGITIVE VISIONS**

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Thesis for the Master's Program in Political Science and International Relations

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ETHICAL DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have conducted my work in accordance with academic rules and ethical behaviour at every stage from the planning of the thesis to its defence. I confirm that I have cited all ideas, information and findings that are not specific to my study, as required by the code of ethical behaviour, and that all statements not cited are my own.

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ABSTRACT

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Drawing on conceptions of democracy in political theory, this thesis attempts to propose a new analytical framework under the title of “Assembly Democracy”. The purpose of the thesis is therefore to investigate the ways in which citizens can engage in public affairs beyond the processes of periodic elections and to offer a classification of the practices that can be categorised under the heading of assembly democracy. While this framework is indebted to participatory and deliberative approaches, it offers a novel perspective on democracy with a particular emphasis on participation. To shed new light on the concept of assembly democracy and its participatory powers, the thesis offers a new classification that involves three varieties each of which has a distinctive vision of democracy: institutional, associational, and fugitive. Furthermore, the thesis scrutinises these three varieties of assembly democracy with particular reference to three thinkers each of whom has a distinctive perspective on civic engagement: Hannah Arendt, Alexis de Tocqueville and Sheldon Wolin. Additionally, in this analysis of these three varieties of assembly democracy, the thesis provides a

short illustration for each variety and assesses the participatory powers of each vision.

Keywords: Assembly democracy, participation, Hannah Arendt, Alexis de Tocqueville, Sheldon Wolin.



ÖZET

MECLİS DEMOKRASİSİNİN ÜÇ TÜRÜ: KURUMSAL, DERNEKSEL VE FİRARİ VİZYONLARIN İNCELENMESİ

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Siyaset teorisindeki demokrasi anlayışlarından yola çıkan bu tez, “Meclis Demokrasisi” başlığı altında yeni bir analitik çerçeve önermeye çalışmaktadır. Bu nedenle tezin amacı, vatandaşların periyodik seçim süreçlerinin ötesinde kamusal meselelere katılma yollarını araştırmak ve meclis demokrasisi başlığı altında kategorize edilebilecek uygulamaların bir sınıflandırmasını sunmaktır. Bu analitik çerçeve, teorik yaklaşımını katılımcı ve müzakereci demokrasi yaklaşımlarına borçlu olmakla birlikte, katılım pratiklerine vurgu yaparak demokrasiye yeni bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Meclis demokrasisi kavramına ve katılımcı güçlerine yeni bir ışık tutmak için bu tez, kurumsal, derneksele ve firari olmak üzere her biri kendine özgü bir demokrasi vizyonuna sahip üç çeşidi içeren yeni bir sınıflandırma önermektedir. Ayrıca tez, bu üç tür meclis demokrasisini, Hannah Arendt, Alexis de Tocqueville ve Sheldon Wolin gibi her biri sivil katılım konusunda farklı bir bakış açısına sahip olan üç düşünürle özel referansla incelemektedir. Buna ek olarak bu tez, üç tür meclis demokrasisinin analizinde, her bir vizyon için kısa bir örnek sunmakta ve her bir

vizyonun katılımcı güçlerini deęerlendirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Meclis demokrasisi, katılım, Hannah Arendt, Alexis de Tocqueville, Sheldon Wolin.



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Topic and Its Significance

Democracy has been one of the most important and central themes of political theory, as well as one of the most contested forms of government. The origins of democracy date back to Ancient Greece, where the most direct practice of democracy took place but also a contempt for it rose following the death of Socrates. Since then, many struggles for democracy and subsequent ups and downs have shown that establishing and maintaining the most preferable form of government requires diligence. Considering that democracy is under constant attack today and that democratic practices get weakened due to authoritarian populist pressures, it can be concluded that democratic vigilance will always retain its relevance.

The historical development of modern democracy has occurred on the basis of constitutionalism. Furthermore, as a regime type, it has been conventionally identified with a mainstream vision which is almost exclusively defined in terms of institutional arrangements, procedures and elected representatives. On this view, democracy is associated with free and fair elections and the protection of basic constitutional rights which in turn is viewed as the most important guarantee for the smooth implementation of the principle of popular sovereignty (Bobbio, 1987; Dahl, 1971; Przeworski, 1999; Schumpeter, 1994). While this approach constitutes an important reference point for our understanding of democracy within contemporary political theory, restricting democracy in this way has been a topic of major controversy both among its friends and foes.

Deeply sceptical of the utopian and unstable inclinations of democracy, its leading and most well-known critics put the need for a filtering mechanism as well as stability above anything else, limit the practice of civic participation to representative institutions and associate popular sovereignty with periodic elections (Hamilton et al., 2003; Schumpeter, 1994). However, deepening democratic deficits, rising protest movements and civic apathy or distrust that have permeated many societies reveal the necessity of reconsidering the limitations of minimal democracy.

That said, there are also many contemporary theorists who find this minimal approach inadequate. By and large, these critical voices emphasise the importance of the involvement of the citizenry in public affairs and express strong criticisms of minimal democracy (Barber, 2003; Pateman, 1970). Moreover, they aim to expand the participatory paradigm by focusing on the quality and procedure of participation (Dryzek, 2000; Habermas, 1996; Landmore, 2020). These critical approaches constitute the basis of participatory and deliberative theories of democracy. As such, they tend to advocate the spread of democratic participation in various fields of public life. In direct opposition to sceptical thinkers, the proponents of participatory and deliberative democracy emphasise the participatory powers and rational potential of ordinary citizens (Habermas, 1996; Parkinson, 2006; Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012). Inspired by this understanding, this thesis aims to reconsider democracy on the basis of participation. To this end, it intends to propose a new analytical framework for scrutinising and classifying the alternative ways of political engagement beyond representative institutions and periodic elections.

However, it is important to note that my intention is not to create a dichotomy between representation and participation. What I intend to do is to expand this widely held view of minimal democracy and explore the possibilities of different forms of civic engagement beyond the limitations of minimal democracy. More specifically, my thesis revolves around the following question: What are the possibilities for political participation other than free and fair elections, which have become the most distinctive and defining feature of modern democracy?

This analytical framework which I propose under the title of “Assembly Democracy” constitutes the main contribution of the thesis. As such, the thesis offers a classification composed of three different varieties of assembly democracy: institutional, associational and fugitive. Therefore, the major objective and contribution of my research is to categorise the approaches and participatory practices that may be classified as assembly democracy. However, I must point out that the concept of assembly democracy should not be confused with the term “parliament” that refers to an area where binding decisions are made, and which is open to the participation of elected representatives alone. Although both terms are basically used to refer to the space where citizens come together, the reason I have chosen the concept of

“assembly” is that it emphasises the arenas and platforms where ordinary citizens get together by way of “assembling”. In this respect, my thesis not only criticises the minimal democracy of elected representatives but also proposes a vision to look at the assembly democracy of ordinary citizens from three different angles: institutional, associational, and fugitive.

1.2. Scope of the Thesis

The varieties of assembly democracy will be discussed in the three core chapters of the thesis: chapters 4, 5 and 6. At the end of each chapter, I will provide a brief example to illustrate the theoretical discussion and assess the participatory powers of each variety. By illustrating each vision in this way, I aim to show that the varieties I explore theoretically in fact are part and parcel of democratic practice as well. Furthermore, illustrating the conceptual discussions of political theory with examples from democratic practice will provide a response to the criticisms directed at the so-called abstract nature of political theory. However, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, I must add that these illustrations are not intended as detailed case studies. The thesis is, thus, primarily a study in political theory.

My attempt to illustrate theoretical discussions with examples owes its inspiration to two political theorists: Hélène Landemore and Elizabeth Anderson. Landemore (2020) has offered a new perspective and coined a new conceptual framework: Open Democracy. In addition, she illustrates this new framework with a democratic experiment from Iceland. Anderson (2006), on the other hand, devotes her study to the discussion of three epistemic theories of democracy. But she too provides an illustration by briefly focusing on community forestry groups in South Asia. In addition to the originality of their discussions, these two theorists have made crucial contributions to the study of political theory with these real-life examples. In a similar vein, I will try to deepen my own theoretical discussion with three brief illustrations.

I will begin my analysis of assembly democracy with the institutional variety which is discussed with particular reference to Hannah Arendt’s perspective. Arendt is one of the most important theorists of contemporary political philosophy. She lived between 1906 and 1975 and witnessed perhaps the darkest moments of human history. Arendt’s most influential works deal with totalitarianism, political action, political judgement

and collective responsibility. Her major works are *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), *The Human Condition* (1958), *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), and *Responsibility and Judgement* (2003). In this thesis I will particularly focus on her book *On Revolution* (1990) in which she presents “The Lost Treasure of the Revolutionary Tradition”. In this last chapter of her book, Arendt provides an analysis of what she calls the council system. Briefly, she argues for the institutionalisation of citizen councils in order to deepen participatory practices. With the pro-institutional arguments of Arendt in mind, I argue that the first variety of assembly democracy in my classification offers an “institutional vision”. I illustrate my discussion of the institutional vision with an example from Spain, “Barcelona en Comú”, a spontaneously formed citizen platform which later acquired an institutional status after winning local elections.

The second variety of assembly democracy will be discussed with reference to the political thought of the French thinker Alexis de Tocqueville. Tocqueville is a 19th century political thinker with an aristocratic background. His two best-known works are *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution* (1866) and his two-volume book *Democracy in America* (1835-1840). In my thesis I will focus on *Democracy in America* and emphasise the importance of voluntary associations and democratic habits in a well-functioning democracy. This is the reason why I argue that the second variety of assembly democracy exhibits an “associational vision”. At the end of this chapter, I will present a voluntary association from Turkey, “Kazdağı Doğal ve Kültürel Varlıkları Koruma Derneği” as an example of the associational variety.

The final version of assembly democracy I discuss draws on Sheldon Wolin’s thinking. Wolin, like Arendt, is one of the most important contemporary political theorists. His major works include *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (1960), *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (2008), *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds: The Making of a Political and Theoretical Life* (2001). In my thesis, I will focus particularly on Wolin’s two influential articles: “Fugitive Democracy” (1994) and “Norm and Form” (2016). I name this variety as fugitive because of Wolin’s emphasis on the fugitive nature of democracy. I will illustrate this fugitive variety of assembly democracy with an example from Turkey: the Gezi Park protests.

The reason why I have chosen these three thinkers for my analysis of assembly democracy is that they all stress the centrality of civic engagement and participation of the citizenry in public affairs in their own ways. While Arendt advocates institutionalisation in order to guarantee ongoing public participation in decision-making processes, Tocqueville attributes the self-sustaining nature of democratic participation to democratic habits and associations. Wolin, on the other hand, advocates an *aconstitutional*, fugitive form of democracy.

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, the first of which is this introduction. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of democratic theory with the hope of situating assembly democracy in a larger theoretical context. Chapter 3 aims to explain the analytical framework of my analysis of assembly democracy. In this chapter, I provide a detailed conceptualization of assembly democracy and offer what I call the participatory powers framework. This framework will help me to assess the participatory powers of the illustrative examples provided at the end of my core chapters. Chapter 4 is devoted to the institutional variety of assembly democracy and the institutional vision of Hannah Arendt. Chapter 5 is devoted to the associational variety of assembly democracy and the associational vision of Alexis de Tocqueville. Chapter 6 is devoted to the fugitive variety of assembly democracy and the fugitive vision of Sheldon Wolin. Lastly, Chapter 7 provides a brief summary and a conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: SITUATING ASSEMBLY DEMOCRACY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DEMOCRATIC THEORY

2.1. Introduction

This chapter draws on a wealth of scholarship on democracy to give a framework for the explanation of the issue that this thesis seeks to address. It starts with the examination and criticism of minimal theories and continues with participatory and deliberative approaches. By focusing on these two approaches, it sets the stage for the theoretical framework of this study and introduces a new analytical model, which is the novel contribution of this study: assembly democracy. Towards the end of this chapter, I summarised the three varieties of assembly democracy to provide a prior review of these three varieties, which will be explored in detail in the next chapters.

2.2. What is Wrong with “Minimal Democracy”?

The participatory and deliberative turn of the 1960s runs counter to another historic body of thinking, the aggregative model, that has long dominated political arguments over its ideas on democracy. This school of thought is the root of contemporary mainstream definitions of democracy and has a strikingly minimal vision.

The fundamental idea of the minimal account holds that democracy is a political method composed of a collection of institutions linked together by elections. Joseph Schumpeter’s concept of democracy is the most commonly used to define democracy on a minimal and procedural basis. Schumpeter challenges the idea of democracy, which he refers to as “the classical doctrine of democracy” that dominated the philosophy of democracy in the 18th century and redefines it as the institutional framework for settling political decisions in which individuals obtain decision-making power through a *competitive* struggle for the popular vote (Schumpeter, 1994, p. 269, my emphasis).

In other words, Schumpeter’s definition of democracy is an inversion of the definitions and objectives of what he calls the “classical doctrine.” Consequently, the ability of the people to make decisions on political matters is secondary to the choice of those who will make the decisions. To put it another way, the populace establishes a national

government and a decision-making body, then gives their consent for their will to be carried out by this body to the representatives (Schumpeter, 1994). In terms of the problem this thesis deals with, the point to be considered in this definition of minimal democracy is that the process of will formation takes place in the formal spheres behind the back doors of institutional structures. However, this exclusionary will formation process brings along many problems, such as the incompatibility between the people's agenda and the policies made by the representatives, and as a result of these problems, people's alienation from politics and social unrest.

Following Schumpeter, Adam Przeworski (1999) defends the Schumpeterian minimalist conception of democracy on the grounds that elections are the most convenient way to change governments without getting involved in brutal conflicts (pp. 12-13). In this view, elections are seen as one method of resolving conflicts. However, Przeworski argues that resolving conflicts by voting has its own set of implications by virtue of creating losers and winners of the election process, consequently leading to the imposition of a will over another (Przeworski, 1999, p. 14). Because in this minimal type of democratic method, there is nothing left but to obey the results of an election. However, he maintains that, while voting does not establish a collective will, it does provide information about the population's feelings, beliefs, and interests. More importantly, voting delineates the limits of power (Przeworski, 1999, p. 15). As a result, he links the legitimacy principle with the contending parties' adherence to the election results rather than legitimacy as understood as the obligation to respect the laws one has actively participated in the formulation. Here we can see not only the difference in Przeworski's definition of democracy, but also the disagreement with deliberative theorists about one of the main problems of political theory, the question of what makes laws legitimate. In a nutshell, democracy for Przeworski is a political method for electing among competing representatives as well as a mechanism for limiting conflicts without violence and allowing opposing parties to promote their objectives within this institutional mechanism.

In a similar vein, Norberto Bobbio adopts this minimal approach and defines democracy as a set of rules establishing procedures and deciding who to authorize to execute the collective decisions (Bobbio, 1987, p. 24). For Bobbio, a final decision

must be reached in accordance with certain rules in order to be acknowledged as a collective decision. Therefore, Bobbio's ideas on democracy revolve around the idea that democracy is a set of regulations that creates procedures to authorize individuals who are then required to deliver policies and laws that are binding for everyone (Bobbio, 1987). Furthermore, he sets the majority rule as the defining characteristic and one of the rules of democracy since procedures are not enough for collective decisions to have binding force on the whole; it also requires the majority's approval. In addition to this method, Bobbio adds a third requirement, fundamental rights and freedoms, that makes this process practicable. These principles are critical to the efficient operation of democracy, as well as for "enabling the game to take place" (Bobbio, 1987, p. 25).

As is evident, this minimal identification is a definition of a political method illustrating elite competition over the votes of ordinary citizens by way of an aggregation of interests and choosing among options. As a result, democracy has become confined to the electoral process, manifesting itself in an enclosed and deformed version of a representative system that was once intended to serve as a set of republican institutions through which people could participate in governing.

As I previously stated, the foundation of the conception of democracy advanced by the major proponents of minimal theory is built on institutional structures, elite competition, and elections. Robert Dahl stands out with an extended view of democracy by adding to the previous definitions, though arguing that there exist a number of requirements that need to be fulfilled so that our "polyarchies" can come close to democracies. Like Schumpeter and others who emphasised the unattainability of the common good, Dahl emphasised the unattainability of a pure democracy. That is why he put forward the concept of "Polyarchy" as an alternative term for democracy and listed eight definitional characteristics in *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (1956) to establish clear standards for democracies that would favour a stable and consolidated government and to differentiate democracy from other forms of government such as oligarchy, aristocracy, and autocracy. Later he developed his theory and offered certain institutional principles of polyarchy in *Polyarchy* (1977), *Democracy and Its Critics* (1989) and *On Democracy* (1998).

However, Dahl makes the same mistake in the early versions of polyarchy as all theorists before him by contrasting authoritarian regimes to define democracy. While the standards it sets for democratic regimes are much more varied and broader, this polyarchal definition still constitute the minimum version of democracy. Because the emphasis is on the institutional principles that operate to protect the electoral process, which resonate with the negative liberties of individuals protecting their constitutional rights but say nothing about how to extend the positive ones. Bohman and Rehg (1997) justifiably criticize Dahl for the fact that his polyarchal vision of democracy still maintains an emphasis on competition among elites, interests, and voting (p. xii).

In addition to these theorists' conceptualization of democracy and their attempt to provide legitimate grounds for the justification of minimal and representative democracy, three major themes might be identified in their arguments regarding the nature of modern society and the "problem" of participation.

The first argument highlights the individualistic and heterogeneous nature of modern society which makes it harder to generate an overarching will of the people. This claim is the starting point for the minimal theorists' search for an empirical grounded theory who find the 18th century democratic theory highly normative and utopian. Schumpeter states that it would only be meaningful to speak of the will of the people in a political circumstance where debates are conducted in public spaces and every individual could be present, as in the Greek polis or in the New England town meetings (Schumpeter, 1994, p. 246). Furthermore, Schumpeter maintains that the creation of the common good and the will of the people is not possible even with the support of logical reasoning since the meaning of these conceptions might differ from one person to another and cannot always be compromised (Schumpeter, 1994, p. 251).

Additionally, politics based on the idea of the common good are viewed as being incoherent because neither a person nor an institution can adequately represent or reflect the will of the people (Przeworski, 2010, p. 26). Also, in a large society where different views and interests dominate and not everyone can rule, sticking to a system that best reflects individual preferences would be the second-best option, even though some of us have to live by laws we didn't prefer (Przeworski, 2010, p. 13). Therefore, aggregating the interests appears to be the easiest way to arrive at a decision and

guarantee the working of a system since it is impossible for everyone in a society adhere to the principles such as “the common good” or “the will of the people”, and the best option would be to decrease the amount of popular participation to ensure stability and order of the political system.

This final assertion leads us to the second argument, which underlines the need to maintain the political system’s stability and order. The primary argument against participation centres on the tension between democracy and stability (Dacombe, 2018; Dahl, 2006; Hamilton et al., 2003). And this second argument converges with the third, that public opinion needs to be managed by a body of representatives. The underlying reasons for these two arguments are the belief that most citizens are incapable of making sound judgements and that their irrational urges, rather than rationality, determine their opinions. A prime example of this view is the Federalist Papers, written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay to persuade Americans to accept the new constitution. Their arguments delineate a picture of an average citizen as being disinterested in politics, having a tendency towards apathy, and not educated enough to make the right decisions. The deep scepticism about citizens’ opinions resulted in limiting the control of the government on part of the ordinary citizens by handing power into the hands of a small elite. In other words, suspicion toward the convictions of average citizens made it a priority to trust the wisdom of a group of experts. This was the republican “cure” Federalists were looking for, one that would purify and broaden the public opinion by channelling them through a selected group of individuals (Hamilton et al., 2003, pp. 44-46). This is also vital for stability in government since it is essential to the national character, and it necessitates that the hands of authority remain constant over an extended period of time (Hamilton et al., 2003, pp. 305-312). Thus, “the election of proper guardians” was preferred to secure the national character as well as to control the factious occurrences (Landemore, 2020; Sezer and Başkır, 2022).

As a result, in addition to the practical necessities of administration and the size of the country, the distrust towards the unsophisticated attitudes of the people led to the promotion of restrictions on the participatory capacities of citizens while leaving behind the problem of effective participation in a representative setting centred around elections.

For the sake of clarity, it is important to mention that this thesis is not trying to create a dichotomy between representation and participation. As Urbinati (2006) points out, representation is crucial, especially in large-scale societies, and an inseparable part of our political systems. However, for the purposes of my thesis, what is important here is the point that minimal representative democracy has reached today and some of the problems it has generated for democracies. These problems can be summarized as the lack of decision-making and agenda-setting power of citizens, the lack of deliberation and transmission between formal and informal areas, and the fact that effective participation is not sufficiently inclusive despite widespread voting rights (Boswell, Hendriks and Ercan, 2016; Landemore, 2020).

While the franchise has a wider scope in terms of gender, age, and status, competitive electoral systems are not inclusive enough as they largely exclude citizens from agenda-setting and decision-making processes. In other words, although participation is inclusive from a practical point of view, it cannot fully meet it from a normative point of view. Further, competitive electoral systems limit the deliberative process within the legislative branch as it brings party discipline into the voting process (Fishkin, 2016, p. 2). This results in inadequate deliberation among legislators and leads to much more worse policy decisions for the citizens. Fishkin also argued that electoral procedures are designed to win the election, not promote citizen deliberation (Fishkin, 2016, pp. 1-2). In short, we might claim that in addition to insufficient deliberation between the formal and informal spheres, there is also an insufficient deliberation within the formal spheres. These problems demonstrate the inadequacy of transmission mechanisms between formal and informal spaces while at the same time revealing the importance of this mechanism.

Furthermore, the majority principle has been set as the foundational principle of minimal aggregative approach. The claim was that a decision can be considered collective and valid if it is approved by the majority. However, it is not possible for a majority rule to be democratic in an institutional setting where people have few opportunities to express their demands and expectations. The tyranny of the majority is the most fearful among the alleged dangers of democracy. Putting forward the principle of majority approval as one of the procedural principles of democracy in a context where participation is very limited might lead to disastrous consequences,

making real the nightmares of both strong democrats and political theorists with a more liberal persuasion including the American federalists.

However, the criticism of the majority principle here should not be understood as criticising mass participation while ignoring the epistemic significance of the majority. Rather, my criticism is directed at theorists who advocate the majority principle while remaining sceptical of people's participation on the grounds that it would jeopardise the functioning of the political system because the public is apathetic and uneducated. Their assumption begs the question of how a majority verdict can be seen as legitimate in an environment where majority of the population is apathetic, a meaningful political participation is discouraged, and deliberation is non-existent.

Moreover, the conceptualization of democracy as a set of institutional principles falls short because, in many countries, a fully democratic government has not been established even if these institutional principles were built. In other words, democratic method is not adequate to establish a "democracy". Today, there are many countries with the above-mentioned institutional frameworks, but many of them fail to meet democratic standards. Herein lies the problem of the competitive and minimal approaches. It cannot fully distinguish between non-democratic and democratic countries. Furthermore, it also ignores the civic requirements of democracy and the "democratic culture" aspect, as it defines democracy as centred on elections. Because democracy is not only a form of government that can exist with institutions, but it is also a culture that requires certain practices, attitudes, and democratic "etiquette" (Tocqueville, 2004).

2.3. Moving from Minimal to Participatory and Deliberative Approaches

The participatory turn both in democratic theory and practice that emerged in the 1960s was mainly a critical response to this minimal and mainstream conception of democracy with its emphasis on representative institutions (Pateman, 1970). Participatory democracy addresses the shortcomings and broken promises of liberal representative democracy and aims at widening the scope of participation by prioritising the principle of direct involvement in its political philosophy and practice. Undoubtedly, one of the requirements for a political system to be considered democratic is to ensure the full and equal participation of all its citizens and to build

its institutions in accordance with this goal by respecting the principles of equality and inclusiveness (Dacombe and Parvin, 2021). In this respect, advocates of this participatory vision had a far broader perspective on politics and democracy than those who supported the minimal and aggregative theories of democracy. As such, they sought to promote participation across a wide range of political and social life. Hence, the search for inclusive and widespread participation has become the point of departure for this new vision: the studies ranging from participatory democracy with a major emphasis on extensive participation, to deliberative democracy with its emphasis on public deliberation and legitimacy, and to radical democratic innovations with an attempt for creating novel forms of participation. Furthermore, this quest is not confined to scholarly debates. On the contrary, it can also be observed in various formal democratic innovations as well as in numerous grassroots political movements and street demonstrations seeking more democracy (Çıdam, 2017; Della Porta, 2009; Frank, 2021; Landemore, 2020; Sitrin and Azzellini, 2014).

This urge to find ways to broaden and deepen public engagement in political decision-making process outside of electoral and usual institutional systems has been shared by a number of theorists and scholars. Thus, after those who consider democracy as a procedural political method, views that take democracy beyond its electoral and bureaucratic aspect emerged. Participatory democracy and deliberative democracy are the two main theories that stand out as the basic tenets of these views. It needs to be stressed once again that the notion of assembly democracy I aim to explore in this study is an extension and further development of this participatory turn.

Historically speaking, we may identify three important moments that influenced the emergence and development of the participatory democratic vision. The first is the period of assembly/direct democracy, the basis of the political communities of ancient civilizations. This period is frequently associated with Ancient Greece, particularly with Athenian democracy (e.g., Dahl, 1998). According to some studies on the other hand, this period dates back to 2500 BC, when small public assemblies were formed (e.g., Keane, 2009). However, the common feature of this period is the direct implementation of the participatory democracy model in small assemblies, but without the principles of equality and inclusiveness.

The second was influenced by the participatory democracy model guided by the ideas of 18th and 19th century thinkers and is predominantly centred on the participatory ideas advanced in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract*. Rousseau's theory of democratic sovereignty requires the involvement of citizens in processes of law-making. As Rousseau explicitly argues, political freedom and legitimacy can only be attained if citizens govern themselves by being the authors of their own laws. In other words, people's sovereignty requires nothing less than obeying the laws citizens prescribe for themselves.

Like Rousseau, John Stuart Mill is among the thinkers often referred to when it comes to participation and its benefits. Although there will always be those who would argue that Mill first and foremost is a liberal and prioritises liberal values more than democracy, Mill's reasons for participation are quite convincing. Mill advocates participation on utilitarian grounds by arguing that it is one of the benefits of a democratic government that it provides the education of the intelligence and of the sentiments of the people when it is needed to take part in political life (Mill, 2015, pp. 284-285).

Mill's justification for the extension of suffrage is that when individuals are invited to participate in the activities that directly affect their lives, it is in their best interest to decide on the most beneficial for them. As a result of this responsible decision-making, their minds and attitudes are educated. They will also be more inclined to make sound judgements as the implications of their deeds will affect every member of the society including themselves. In short, participation helps to make people be aware of the other-regarding nature of their choices by creating informed citizens conscious of their actions and their results. Here, a contrast can be observed between Mill and the minimal theorists who argue that participation will lead to instability and disorder due to people's lack of knowledge of political issues. While in Mill's arguments participation is seen as an educational tool, in minimal theorists, participation is an action that should be narrowed down in the case of lack of education.

Referring to Alexis de Tocqueville, Mill also highlighted the importance of popular institutions of participation on the mental cultivation of the people. In this respect, Mill emphasised the significance of participation at the local level and showed how

participatory institutions mould people's other-regarding behaviour by fostering the public spirit and developing their intelligence (Mill, 2015, p. 358). Local government institutions, according to Mill, serve as important means of public education by allowing people to participate in the working and by bringing together people of high-quality intellect with the average, raising the general intelligence of society (Mill, 2015, p. 362).

However, because the ability of the public to participate in the general affairs of the state is quite limited, with the exception of local institutions, Mill broadens the definition of political participation to include reading and writing newspapers, attending public meetings and submitting various kinds of demands to political authorities. In other words, Mill views these as opportunities for political participation that exist between elections (Mill, 2015, p. 358).

The third upsurge of participatory democracy began in the mid 20th century. Following a period of world wars and disasters, and the questioning the true nature of democracy, the concept of participation has grown significantly and been elevated to the forefront of political discourse once again, particularly in the 1960s under the influence of the New Left and student movements. Representative democracy, with its extremely restricted understanding by minimal theorists in terms of periodic elections as a fair and stable mechanism for the selection of representatives, has been extensively challenged by the supporters of participatory democracy, who argue that participation should be expanded throughout a wide range of areas of social and political life. Thus, disaffection with existing political systems has been associated with the shortcomings of liberal representative democracy, and this paved the way for a call for participatory democracy.

Carole Pateman is the most frequently cited author when discussing the role of participation in contemporary democratic theory. Pateman (1970) highlights the need of extensive citizen engagement in her work *Participation and Democratic Theory*, in which she investigates workers' self-management in Yugoslavia in response to the allegation made by minimal theorists that people are indifferent and disinterested in politics. Pateman asserts that in addition to the political context, extensive citizen participation in daily life and the workplace is educational, increases political efficacy,

and so adds to civic engagement. What Pateman does is not merely advocate participatory democracy but also provide empirical proof of this theory, which political “scientists” in search of an empirical theory see as abstract and utopian.

Furthermore, the primary logic behind the participatory democracy’s arguments for the workplace democracy is not limited to democratise the workplace for its own sake; it also aims to transform the workplace as a leaning point, which will make it possible to achieve a more egalitarian redistribution of power, resulting in a higher democratisation of the whole system (Bachrach and Botwinick, 1992, p. ix). Thus, participatory democracy involves a much broader vision that aims to transform the entire political system by spreading participation in many places. That is why the emphasis on workplace democracy is important as it represents a serious milestone towards this transformation. However, Bachrach and Botwinick draw our attention to the problem of implementation and criticise participatory theory’s overemphasis on “what ought to be” and its failure to address practical suggestions for putting this paradigm into practice. In response to this need, Benjamin Barber’s (2003) “Strong Democracy” model stands out as the pioneering example of the efforts to put the idea of participatory democracy into practice and institutionalise it.

Just as Pateman supports participation in various places, including the workplace, Benjamin Barber too offers an alternative participatory mode of politics to the commonly accepted notion of liberal democracy, which he calls “thin democracy”. What Barber calls “strong democracy” is a mode of participatory politics that aims to propose a solution to the shortcomings and limitations of liberal democracy by strengthening local institutions that may encourage greater citizen involvement in formal decision-making processes. Unlike liberal democracy, strong democracy brings active participation, talking, and deliberation to the forefront while placing the individual at the centre of politics. In this way, it aims to transform private and isolated individuals into self-governing citizens who are the authors, protectors, and enforcers of their laws by virtue of an ongoing process of democratic talk (Barber, 2003, pp. 134-182).

While participatory democracy constitutes one of the theoretical foundations of the framework of this thesis, it also adds deliberative democracy to the other pillar.

Because the distinctiveness of the participatory and deliberative theories resides in their broadened conception of politics and democracy that include many forms of political involvement such as small assemblies, voluntary associations, and street demonstrations and political movements alongside structured and formal activities. Furthermore, it is the efforts of both participatory and deliberative theorists that advocated for the establishment of specific forums that would allow citizens to participate in politics in today's representative democracies (e.g., Dryzek, 2000, 2010; Fishkin, 2009, 2016; Fung, 2007; Fung and Wright, 2003; Landemore, 2020; Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012; Smith, 2009). This effort is important as it sheds light on how participation can be made possible in a representative setting.

Deliberative democracy, therefore, emerged as another critique of minimal democracy, which we often encounter in the form of liberal democracy. Following the participatory trend in the 1960s, the second half of the 20th century marked the beginning of the “deliberative turn” in the theory of democracy (Dryzek, 2000, p. v). Participatory democracy, as we have seen, promotes spreading participation over many sectors. Deliberative democracy shifts the focus by putting the mode of participation, namely the process itself, at the centre of democratic theory and practice. In the same way that participatory democracy defines participation as the ability to participate in decision-making, deliberative democracy defines participation as the capacity and opportunity to engage in the deliberative process. Moreover, this involvement is considered the foundation of legitimacy in a democracy. As a result of the growing interest in deliberation, the core components of democracy have shifted from voting and interest aggregation, as in the minimal accounts, to deliberation (Dryzek, 2000).

In the most general sense, deliberative democracy is centred upon the principles of rational legislation, participatory politics, and self-governance, and it contends that the basis of legitimate law-making derives from the public deliberation of citizens (Bohman and Rehg, 1997). Jürgen Habermas is regarded as the founder of this deliberative school of thought with a particular focus on public debate. Habermas refers to his model of democratic politics as “discourse theory” (Habermas, 1994; 1996; Olson, 2014). By pointing out the liberal view of democratic politics' tendency towards interest aggregation, and the republican views' “ethical overload”, he

introduces his proceduralist conception of democratic politics with an emphasis on communication between the citizenry (Habermas, 1994, pp. 1-7). In his new theory of democratic politics, Habermas draws ideas from both sides and combines them in novel ways. He furthers this theory with his “co-originality” thesis that blends human rights and the principle of popular sovereignty. According to co-originality thesis, individual liberties, and the right to participate are equally important as the enjoyment of private autonomy depends on the people’s use of their political autonomy (Habermas, 2001, p. 767). In contrast to the minimalist models’ understanding of interest aggregation, deliberative democracy is interested in the formation of preferences through reasoned discussion and public debate with the end result of a rational consensus. The main assumption here is that a reasoned discussion would lead to the best decisions and logical preferences. As Habermas points out, “the unforced force of the better argument” perfectly summarizes the main logic of deliberative theory (Habermas, 1996, pp. 305-306). Therefore, we may argue that the consensus reached through public deliberation is the logical reformulation of the will of the people. Thus, being able to endorse the laws and policies they are subject to as one’s own is considered to be public deliberation’s most significant contribution to democratic theory and democratic legitimacy (Lafont, 2017, pp. 85–86).

One of the main questions that arises when we speak about deliberative democracy is where such public deliberation might take place. In response to this specific question, the development of deliberative democracy was followed by the emergence of deliberative forums/assemblies in which this idea could be implemented. I shall discuss these in detail in the next chapters but before that, I will briefly summarise these three varieties in the next section.

2.4. Three Varieties of Assembly Democracy

In line with this joint framework of participatory and deliberative theories, one of the main arguments of this thesis is that democracy is not just a form of government consisting of elections and representative institutions. More significantly, democratic politics requires greater possibilities for greater citizen involvement beyond the mechanisms of electoral participation. As a result, this argument raises the question of how and where public participation can be found in a way that allows people to express their demands and impact policy decisions outside the electoral process and

mainstream spheres of decision-making. In general, the arguments of participatory and deliberative theorists can be seen in the efforts to bridge the gap between ordinary citizens and political elites through a variety of channels, including innovative forums/councils/assemblies, voluntary associations, and protest movements. In the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly mention these three channels, which I conceive of as alternative modes of democratic participation, and I will delve into the details in the following chapters. I propose to classify these alternative modes under the heading of “Assembly Democracy” which in my view involves three main varieties: institutional, associational, and fugitive.

The well-recognized forms of the institutional variety include citizen assemblies, councils, participatory budgeting, neighbourhood assemblies/councils, deliberative polls, citizens’ juries (Bherer, Dufour and Montambeault, 2016). These are the efforts that can be summarized as the attempts for institutionalising citizen participation under the umbrella term of “democratic innovations” and they are invented to increase and deepen public involvement in the political decision-making processes (Smith, 2009). Smith’s (2009) comprehensive work perfectly examines these innovations and emphasises their importance as they represent a shift from the mainstream institutional architecture to a pathbreaking institutional design which gives a formal role to ordinary people in decision-making (pp. 1-2). Although specific forms these innovations may take differs from one another, their common feature is the need to facilitate citizen involvement in decision-making by creating spaces where citizens may discuss and deliberate common problems and public affairs. I argue that the philosophical underpinnings of these endeavours in contemporary theory of democracy may be found in Hannah Arendt’s ideal of “Council System”, which she advocated in her book *On Revolution*.

In *On Revolution*, Arendt (1990) examines the council system, which she describes as “the lost treasure of the revolutionary tradition”. She criticizes the American Revolution, which she sees as successful compared to the French Revolution, for not being able to preserve and maintain an institution for “public happiness” that springs from acting in and participating in public affairs. The source of this critique is central to Arendt’s notion of freedom. She distinguishes freedom from liberty which is often regarded as the absence of any impediment to the choices individuals make. By

contrast, Arendt defines freedom positively as an ability to act and being a participant in government (Arendt, 1990, pp. 217-218). Because Arendt sees political institutions as the foundation of freedom and the ability to act and participate in government, she argues that a proper place should be allocated for citizen participation (Berkowitz, 2018). In other words, Arendt argues for the inclusion of the spontaneously emerging councils at all revolutionary moments into the formal institutional structure of contemporary democratic regimes. Furthermore, Arendt asserts that councils might replace existing representative institutions including the party system while ensuring institutionally protected areas for citizen participation.

As mentioned in the search for participatory democracy, Benjamin Barber's "Strong Democracy" model can be seen as an extension of the idea of institutionalising citizen participation. In this new mode of politics, strong democracy appears as an alternative to the institutions of liberal democracy, which Barber argues, excludes participation and active citizenship. That is why Barber argues for institutionalising strong democracy through various forms of participatory mechanisms starting from local and municipal politics to the national level as a way to enhance citizen participation and civic engagement as well as to create solutions to the problems arising from "too little democracy" (Barber, 2003, p. xxxi).

Barber argues that strong democracy provides a modern version of participatory democracy through its participatory institutions without falling into face-to-face parochialism or old republicanism (Barber, 2003, p. 117). He proposes a set of components to realize and institutionalise strong democracy. The institutional structure of strong democracy comprises of units such as neighbourhood assemblies, civic communication cooperatives, civic education postal act, local volunteer programmes and so on to navigate democracy toward a more participatory scheme (Barber, 2003, p. 263).

Drawing from the same concerns as with participatory and deliberative theorists, and by pointing out the deficiencies of the existing paradigm of representative democracy, H el ene Landemore (2020) lays the foundations of her own concept, *Open Democracy*. One of the prominent arguments from which this model of open democracy originates is that representative democracy is not the only way to institutionalise the people's

power, and that representative democracy can be made open to the participation of ordinary citizens through various participatory channels (Landemore, 2020). The channels for the realisation of this model, the mini publics, would be compatible with representative democracy thanks to their initiative to institutionalise these open democratic forums into the institutional framework of representative democracy. With this new paradigm of democracy, Landemore aims to place ordinary citizens at the centre of politics via open fields suitable for their involvement and influence on policy making.

The second variety of assembly democracy treats associational membership as a form of political participation, and this constitutes one of the main pillars of the views that form the central argument of this thesis. That democracy also requires a certain “act” to sustain and flourish itself. Alexis de Tocqueville was the person who saw that in his trip to America and set forth his arguments in his book *Democracy in America*. Democracy has a peculiar meaning in Tocqueville’s mind. He sees democracy as an “irresistible” and “providential” fact that is based on equality of conditions where castes and unequal social relations has never been existed (Tocqueville, 2004, pp. 3-6). More significantly, Tocqueville’s central argument, besides all of his analysis, is that democracy is more than a regime type, a set of institutions or a method, but it is also a way of life, a culture that necessitates a certain *habit* to associate. This associational habit shapes people’s minds, fosters public spirit and permeates the way of life, customs, and habits of the Americans. In Tocqueville’s terms, “the art of association” has become “the fundamental science” in America (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 606).

This strong emphasis on the place of associations in a democracy is the essential part of Tocqueville’s views regarding democracy. Tocqueville asserted that voluntary associations have positive effects on democracy by way of combating the ills stemming from this irresistible condition and observed that associations encourage participation while being guarantees against the tyranny of the majority. Because for Tocqueville, in the age of democracy where everyone is equal, private individuals are weak by themselves and they are in need of forming associations. Therefore, associations appear to be the vital mechanisms for realizing freedoms and combating despotic tendencies of the state. Furthermore, Tocqueville also included the townships

in his analysis, together with the associations, and concluded that these local assemblies foster a “taste for liberty” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 331).

Based on Tocqueville’s ideas on voluntary associations, I approach this concept from the perspective of democratic theory. Specifically, I argue that on top of its social and cultural dimensions, being a member of a voluntary association is a political act and a way of participating in politics, as the people assembled in those associations can exert influence on the acts of the state.

Lastly, the third variety of assembly democracy arises when people become more dissatisfied and critical of existing institutions, centralised bureaucracies, and political parties, their ways of expressing their views become much more direct, immediate, extra-institutional, and sometimes fugitive. This reaction finds itself in many spontaneous protests, street demonstrations, and many other informal acts of political dissent. Therefore, protest movements and spontaneous gatherings constitute the third variety of assembly democracy. I named this variety “Fugitive” because of its spontaneous and transient nature and the fact that it takes place outside of institutional processes. This term owes its meaning to Sheldon Wolin’s (1994) *fugitive democracy*, which challenges the mainstream conception of democracy as a form of government.

Furthermore, many scholars have included a wide range of political acts in the glossary of participation, including unconventional forms of political behaviour such as political protests (Bean, 1991; Geissel and Newton, 2012). Others have conceptualized democracy by focusing on the structures of social movements in which the “pure” form of it might be found (Della Porta, 2009). That is why the fugitive variety aims to represent a distinctive form of democracy in which different participatory and deliberative strategies can be observed.

This study emerged from this literature on democracy and participation to show that democracy is more than a form of government with mainstream institutional arrangements of representative democracy. Considering their common features, I refer to them as “assemblies” and I shall analyse their participatory powers under the title of “assembly democracy”. Although these three varieties are not identical and differ from each other in many ways, they also share some important commonalities that help

us bring them together under the same heading. First of all, all three varieties involve the act of coming together, or, in other words, assembling to act, deliberate, and participate. This act of participation is different from voting since both three forms require that people assemble in public with their fellow citizens. These are the underlying points that are unique to this type of participation. Voting as a democratic act is private, whereas assembling is a public act. Therefore, this thesis aims to emphasise this public component.

Moreover, the three varieties discussed above all are civic activities using the same techniques to accomplish their goals. In both types, a group of individuals gather to create a deliberative and participatory assembly. Their objectives stand for and demand a number of values, including control over decision-making, deliberation, agenda-setting, inclusivity, and greater transparency. Additionally, by their actions, they serve as a transmission channel between the domains of power and civic life. While doing all of these, they form a narrative about what is being demanded.

I will give a more detailed account of assembly democracy in the next chapter. Furthermore, I will also provide a number of principles that may help us assess the participatory powers of these three varieties of assembly democracy. Such an analysis, as I will show, has the potential to put us in a better position to acknowledge the contemporary relevance of assembly democracy as well as the limitations of minimal democracy that restricts participation to casting a ballot on election days.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

3.1. Introduction

To justify the employment of this term in the thesis, it is necessary to list a few definitions and clarify what is meant by assembly democracy. The concept of assembly democracy is frequently used to describe direct democracy, especially with reference to Athenian democracy, as an expression of a form of government where citizens come together to deliberate and vote on various issues through regular face-to-face meetings in the public sphere. In other words, it is used to draw a procedural contrast between the ancient —particularly with reference to ancient Greek democracy, and the modern democracies, and this procedural opposition is meant to distinguish the representative democracy of the “moderns” from the direct democracy of the “ancients”. Accordingly, the Greeks were the inventors and pioneers of democracy, and the political system they established, namely the assembly democracy, was a primitive version of ours (Dahl, 1998). However, it is vital to stress once again here that my intention in this study is not to contrast direct democracy with representative democracy. Instead, the main purpose of my analysis is to draw a connection between the ancient and modern versions through the illustrations of the assemblies. For this reason, this chapter will provide a look at some definitions of assembly democracy in the literature and will provide a connection between the institutional composition of ancient assemblies and today’s assemblies. Later in this chapter, I will define the participatory powers of assembly democracy as a framework with which to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the brief empirical illustrations that exemplify different varieties of assembly democracy.

3.2. Conceptualising Assembly Democracy

Hélène Landemore (2020) starts her discussion of assembly democracy by referring to ancient Greek democracy, existed in between fifth and fourth century BC. Therefore, what is meant by assembly democracy is the Ancient Greek democracy, mainly Athens, which is considered as a classical example of direct democracy. According to the general acceptance, representation did not take place in Ancient Athens and citizens were directly getting involved in agenda setting and decision-making processes. However, Landemore rejects the mainstream idea that representation was

absent in Ancient Athens. On the contrary, she argues that Athens was not an ideal type and an example of direct democracy, rather it was a proto-representative democracy (Landemore, 2020, p. 56).

On the other hand, John Keane completely rejects the idea that democracy and self-governing assemblies were the invention of the ancient Greeks. Keane's starting point is as follows: assembly democracy and its foundations were first laid in the East, in places that coincide with what is now Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and they spread over a wide geography from there. When it arrived in the West and in Athens during the fourth and fifth centuries BC, it was claimed to be something peculiar to the West, as a sign of Western superiority over the "barbarism" of the East. (Keane, 2009, para. 4). While this crucial argument is worthy of discussion, what matters in the context of this thesis is that the era of assembly democracy, whether a Greek invention or not, began with the creation of small public assemblies.

If we take a look at the institutional structure of Ancient Athens, it was composed of several bodies such as the Boule (the Council of 500), the Ekklesia (the People's Assembly), the Nomothetai and the Courts (Landemore, 2020). Among these four main bodies, the Council of 500 possess the agenda-setting power with five hundred randomly selected citizens (Landemore, 2020). On the other hand, majority of the citizens get together in the Ekklesia (the People's Assembly) which is an open assembly enable people to deliberate and vote on the issues set by the Council of 500 (Landemore, 2020). In other words, the Council of 500 can be said to be the main institution of Ancient Athens in which the agenda-setting power lies, where the Courts rather than the People's Assembly, have the democratic feature in which judicial subjects were being decided by hundreds of citizens (Landemore, 2020, p. 67). It should be remembered, though, that the idea of citizenship in ancient Greece was quite different from what it is now, and those who were members of the demos and had a voice in government constituted a very small portion of the total population.

Notwithstanding the exclusionary character of the demos, the structural premise of assembly democracy was public discussion and deliberation. The assemblies were the perfect places where every issue at stake could be publicized (Hansen, 2008). In that sense, those places were not only decision-making organs, but they were also the

forums ensuring that many issues could be brought to the public agenda and the attention of many citizens (Hansen, 2008, p. 41). For this reason, the concept of “assembly democracy” is used in the literature to refer to the forms of self-government carried out by face-to-face assemblies, particularly with reference to ancient Greece.

Recently, “assembly democracy” has been used as an inclusive term for citizen assemblies, citizen juries, popular assemblies, town meetings, etc., in which the most direct version of decision-making takes place (Schaub, 2012; Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2015). These assemblies are intended to transcend the traditional mechanisms of representative democracy and aim to empower people to take part in decision-making more directly by providing them with public places where they can deliberate and discuss face-to-face. The most well-known historical instances of these assemblies can be found in the New England townships, in Swiss municipalities, and later in many democratic innovations.

Comparable examples of decision-making bodies can also be found in spontaneously emerging councils during the 19th and 20th century revolutions. Moreover, without a formal decision-making power, these assemblies perpetuate themselves in associations and in many street movements. The logic is the same: it refers to a particular gathering for a particular purpose in a public space with the initiative of the people. So, the term I adopted, “assembly democracy”, refers to the practical parallelism between the ancient and modern forms. Therefore, my aim is to extend the use of this term by offering a classification to include the participatory initiatives that I have mentioned.

Last but not least, Judith Butler, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri are among the scholars that need to be credited while discussing the term assembly. Judith Butler (2015) mentions the gatherings of people by drawing attention to the performative aspects of political actions in the public sphere and calls them assemblies. These assemblies signify a “concerted movement” and refer to the act of coming together on public squares (Butler, 2015, p. 155). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2017) also use the term assembly to “grasp the power of coming together and acting politically in concert” (p. xxi). Therefore, they use the term for a wide range of activities of coming together through which political potentialities can be found. The vision of assembly in their mind has a horizontal and leaderless character.

The notion of assembly pointed out by Butler as well as by Hardt and Negri highlights the same feature of assemblies: coming together and showing physical presence in public spaces. We can situate the assemblies put forward by these scholars in the literature of square movements and leaderless civic initiatives. However, there exists a point at which they differ is the final destination of these movements in the shape of public assemblies. For instance, Butler highlights the transient and performative character of assemblies. In this respect, she seems closer to the fugitive camp. On the other hand, Hardt and Negri stress the importance of institutionalising these horizontal assemblies. Their arguments echo Arendt's in the sense that they also argue that political movements and revolutionary initiatives require enduring institutions so that they may have lasting effects.

In sum, three varieties of assembly democracy I present in this thesis share some common characteristics in terms of their modes of action and functions. They may be viewed as an alternative to traditional participatory and decision-making mechanisms, occasionally appear in opposition to the sphere of institutionalised power and function as spheres of ongoing public discussion and opinion formation.

The first variety of assembly democracy I present involves deliberative forums designed to deepen citizen participation. I have named this variety "institutional" because of its connection to institutional mechanisms. The second variety of assembly democracy includes voluntary associations and civic initiatives. Thus, in my classification it is called "associational". Finally, the third variety includes spontaneous protest movements and episodic civic upheavals. Due to the nature of its formation, this third variety in my analysis is called "fugitive".

Thus, the concept of assembly democracy in my analysis can be seen as an analytical framework exhibiting certain principles that can be used to evaluate certain modes of democratic participation rather than a full-fledged theory. In my thesis, the purpose is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the institutional, associational and fugitive forms of assemblies in terms of their participatory capacities. To be sure, both this framework and the way I conceptualise assembly democracy owes a great deal to participatory and deliberative paradigms I have mentioned earlier. This means that the analytical framework, which I call the *participatory powers framework*, has been

distilled from the influential ideas offered by these two theories. The remainder of this chapter will focus on defining those analytical tools.

3.3. The Participatory Powers Framework

In assessing the participatory powers of three varieties of assembly democracy, this study considers the extent to which they fulfil five democratic and participatory criteria. These are listed as follows: deliberation, inclusiveness, transparency, transmission and agenda-setting. These criteria have been brought together based on the literature on democracy and aim to examine the features prioritised by both classical and contemporary democratic theories. As the theoretical framework demonstrates, these norms are essential to democratic legitimacy, and they are required to evaluate the participatory performance of the assembly democracy. In this way, it intends to assess the extent to which democratic participation methods other than elections can meet the criteria of traditional participation while also revealing the possibilities and places where it goes beyond this.

This list of participatory powers takes their origins both from traditional functions attributed to the democratic institutions and normative democratic theory. It should be noted, however, that the definitions of the principles I refer to as participatory powers might very well vary from one context to another. I will define them within the context of the theories upon which my study's theoretical framework is based. Consequentially, these principles will measure the extent to which participatory powers are fulfilled. I will do so with the help of short illustrations that I provided for each variety of assembly democracy in the following chapters.

3.3.1. Deliberation

The first principle is derived from the arguments of deliberative democracy theorists asserting that political decisions are legitimate only if they are the outcomes of a deliberative process among citizens. That is, this principle draws attention to the communicative process between political equals. Deliberation is important for at least two reasons. The first of these is that the legitimacy of the decision reached at the end of deliberative process is much more legitimate than the decision that is decided among the representatives and submitted to the vote. The second is that it is more possible and fairer to reach a reasonable common good for all as a result of the free discussion of

ideas and the interaction of opposing views in the public sphere. Although the deliberative process is seen by critics as an effort to provide unanimity, its main purpose is to pave the way for logical argumentation with the end result of a reasonable and acceptable consensus. Notwithstanding Chantal Mouffe's (2000) claim that the effort to reach consensus will put an end to the *political*, the process of logical argumentation that leads us to consensus has the potential to allow the political to be revealed. Because the communicative process enables conflicting ideas that form the basis of the *political* to be brought to light. Thus, the political has a chance to reveal and reproduce itself as long as there is a place for rational discussion and deliberation.

Given the ability of deliberative will formation to provide legitimacy through inclusive and transparent stages (Habermas, 2006), this section will assess the assemblies' deliberative capacity in generating public opinion.

3.3.2. Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness is among the most essential tenets of democracy. As the term "democracy" refers to people's rule, inclusion is an inherent principle of democracies. For this reason, it can be said that democracy is the most inclusive regime among others. However, to test and verify this assumption as well as assess the inclusiveness of the assemblies, it is significant to look at the functioning of ancient and modern democracies. Because the basic ideas of participatory and deliberative theories maintain that in a democracy, a decision is just and acceptable only if those who are subjected to it are included in the deliberation and decision-making processes.

As previously stated, the People's Assembly allowed all Athenian citizens to deliberate and vote, but in fact relatively few people were able to participate. Because Athenian citizens constituted a very tiny proportion of the whole population. Women, slaves, and foreigners have always been denied citizenship as well as political rights. On the other hand, some of those who had these rights were deprived of participation due to various spatial and financial impediments. As a result, a small portion of citizens were deliberating and voting on behalf of the majority. In that sense, in addition to the exclusion based on sex, race and social status, Athenian democracy was exclusionary in terms of who was eligible to be present at the Assembly.

By the 19th century, the concept of citizenship and the right to vote had been expanded, but the privileged nature of franchise remained. Women and property-less were deprived of the right to vote for a long time. Again, this was a factor that excluded a large part of society from participation. What we see in both ancient and modern democracies is the exclusion of women, slaves, foreigners, property-less and minorities. Finally, it was in the 20th century that all barriers were removed.

In the most recent form of our modern representative democracy, the right to vote has been considerably expanded, along with the breadth of political rights and citizenship. However, a large part of society is left out of the sphere of decision-making, and in addition to this exclusion, citizens are not adequately represented. In other words, although restrictions have largely been lifted in modern representative democracies, the exclusionary feature persists since agenda-setting power is in the hands of a small minority of people qualified enough to be members of parliament. Likewise, in Athenian democracy agenda-setting power vested on the Council of 500, while People's Assembly enjoying the political rights remanent from the Council of 500 (Landemore, 2020). In other words, the People's Assembly lacked the same political equality as with the Council of 500 in terms of agenda setting and decision-making power. Therefore, both forms are not sufficient enough to be qualified as fully democratic since they are deficient in terms of inclusiveness and political equality. As a result, people are accompanied by a sense of being ignored and unable to change policy decisions. All of this leaves citizens with the impression that their opinions don't matter and that they have no influence over politics. As Landemore so eloquently puts it, what is lacking in both ancient and modern democracies is the political system's accessibility and *openness* to ordinary citizens. What Landemore refers to as openness, I shall refer to as "inclusiveness". And I argue that inclusiveness would be better realized through the spaces that are open and accessible to all citizens who are willing to participate. I recognise that physical presence will not be possible for every social group but broadening the scope of inclusion in many stages of democratic practice would ensure the maximum expression of ideas, demands, and viewpoints on problems for which a public is attempting to solve (Young, 2002). Considering the importance of inclusion and uneven opportunities for participation in democracy, this part will serve to assess the inclusiveness of the assemblies by asking the following questions:

- Who has the right to participate?
- Which social groups does this variety of assembly include?
- How accessible/open is this for attending?

3.3.3. Transparency

The principle of transparency is perhaps the only principle that should be in every democracy, regardless of the mode of participation, as it functions as an accountability and surveillance mechanism over the actions of public officials or authorised persons. It centres around the openness of the process to both participants and the wider public (Smith, 2009). In addition to all of the elements required for democratic legitimacy, it is crucial that these are implemented in a transparent manner. Without a transparent process, democratic legitimacy would be in danger.

Smith (2009) argues that transparency is important at least for two reasons. First, transparency generates a scrutinising mechanism as it requires that participants have a clear understanding regarding the conditions under which they are participating. Second, transparency as being open to the wider public generates publicity, which serves as a mechanism for transmitting information about institutions and decisions. It helps people to judge the functioning of institutions and the actions of the decision makers in terms of their legitimacy and credibility (Smith, 2009, pp. 25-26).

It should be noted that transparency goes hand in hand with inclusiveness. Because as decision-making and policy-making processes become more inclusive and accessible to the wider public, they will involve more people in scrutinising the actions of policymakers and representatives. This will contribute to a more transparent execution of the process. However, as the system becomes more exclusionary, transparency will suffer.

Transparency builds trust. Building trust is important especially for today, where people do not trust government officials and institutions. Moreover, transparency as a scrutinising mechanism is much more important for holding government officials accountable for their actions. As long as the authorities are held accountable for their actions, they are prevented from acting against the public interest. This improves system performance and aids in the restoration of lost confidence. Thus, this section

will concentrate on how and to what extent transparency is achieved in these three different forms of assemblies considering the significance of transparency in democracy.

3.3.4. Transmission

Deliberative democracy necessitates a mechanism for the transmission of public opinion to the state since it is founded on communicative action (Dryzek, 2000). What is meant by “transmission” is the communicative process through which opinions and interests formed in informal spheres are delivered to formal spheres. In other words, transmission has an influence over decision-making processes in formal spheres by providing the connection between formal and public spaces.

Moreover, transmission serves as a source that facilitates inclusion by transferring ideas and claims between various contexts, particularly between informal public discussion realms and formal decision-making spheres (Boswell, Hendriks and Ercan, 2016). As a result, with the aid of transmission, varied sets of thoughts move between numerous venues, allowing them to be transmitted to both informal and formal settings, making the entire process more inclusive.

In the minimal/aggregative model of democracy, transmission appears in the form of voting, within which public opinion is transmitted and reflected only through the regular elections. In this mode of democracy, the deliberation process is mostly held in the parliament, and the end result is proposed to the preferences of citizens, who will transmit their opinions by way of casting a ballot. However, in the deliberative model, the means for transmission is a discursive process, a process of will formation via mutual interaction of opinions in the public sphere. This may occur in many places, such as in the streets, non-governmental organizations, associations, or deliberative forums.

Since the purpose of this thesis is to investigate participatory mechanisms outside elections, this participatory power of transmission will focus on the deliberative mode of transmission that emerges in the public sphere, namely in the three varieties of assembly democracy. Therefore, this section will focus on the transmissional role of institutional, associational, and fugitive forms of assemblies. While doing this, this

assessment will show how transmission can be put into practice in a deliberative and participatory setting.

3.3.5. Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting emerges as another important participatory power. The political system is democratic as long as the people have the authority to establish the agenda, since democracy guarantees people influence over political agendas and decision-makers. The capacity to determine the political agenda is crucial especially in today's world where almost every individual is dissatisfied with the agenda set by the representatives because they are not responsive to the demands of the public.

To clarify the purpose of using agenda-setting as a participatory power, it is necessary to define what is meant by the agenda. I will use the term "agenda" to refer to the set of problems or themes that government officials, as well as others outside of government, are giving substantial consideration (Kingdon, 2014, p. 3). In other words, not only the government officials in empowered spheres but also the people outside the government, such as interest groups, associations, citizen forums or protestors may have the power over the issues constituting the political agenda. I argue that agenda-setting power could exert influence over the political system only with the joint effort of deliberation in an inclusive and transparent manner in the public realm and transmission to the formal areas.

Agenda-setting practices reveal how and why an issue is prioritized. It is a tool for identifying and setting the boundaries of problems and proposing practical solutions. In this respect, it is extremely important for citizens to have the power to set the agenda in order to address collective problems and demands. However, in a system where decision-making power is concentrated primarily in empowered spheres, agenda-setting power is concentrated in the same body as well. For this reason, the agenda-setting power of informal spheres has not received the attention it deserves. Therefore, this section will ask how successful the assemblies are at bringing the issue to the attention of decision-makers and pushing them to establish the political agenda based on the issue at hand.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I defined assembly democracy and explained how I conceptualised it. Then I defined participatory powers within the framework of this thesis, which are the assessment tools of this analytical model. In the following chapter, I will discuss the first variety of assembly democracy, the institutional branch, and I will illustrate my discussion by evaluating the example given at the end of the following chapter in terms of its participatory powers using the participatory powers framework I proposed in this chapter.



CHAPTER 4: THE INSTITUTIONAL VISION OF ASSEMBLY DEMOCRACY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the idea of institutionalising participation and to assess the participatory powers of the institutional branch of assembly democracy. In the second chapter, I argued that the philosophical underpinnings of institutionalising citizen participation may be found in Hannah Arendt's writings, especially in her book *On Revolution*, in which she presented the council system as "The Lost Treasure of the Revolutionary Tradition". I will expand on my argument to draw a parallelism between Arendt's view of councils and some recent citizen initiatives. I will briefly present and discuss Arendt's concept of council system, which prompted some commentators to label her as utopian and naïve (e.g., Canovan, 1978; Wellmer, 1999). However, it should be noted that my aim here is not to defend Arendt's council system, but to emphasise the political significance of Arendt's idea of councils and to draw attention to its affinity with some trends in democratic politics. Thus, my intention here is not to provide a thorough assessment of Arendt's political theory.

To this end, first, I will discuss the idea behind the attempts to institutionalise citizen participation with an eye to Arendt's perspective. Second, I will present a neighbourhood movement intended to institutionalise broad citizen participation and I will assess the participatory powers of the institutional variety of assembly democracy through a short illustration from Barcelona. This chapter is structured as follows. First, it starts with a brief overview of the council tradition in Hannah Arendt's political thought. Second, I will briefly discuss Arendt's criticism of representative democracy which in my view is a justification for her support for the council system. Third, I examine the notions that are at the core of Arendt's political philosophy and at the basis of her defence of the council system. This last point is closely related to Arendt's criticism of the American Revolution and the framers of the federal constitution. In the last section of this chapter, I will present an illustration that in my view practically exemplifies Arendt's idea of council system.

4.2. A Brief Look at the Council Tradition

Throughout the mid-19th and 20th centuries, revolutionary councils emerged in several European countries with the initiatives of workers, soldiers and many other people. They were spontaneously emerged, bottom-up local entities with a number of revolutionary aims (Popp-Madsen, 2021). This spontaneity signifies the organising process of councils and indicates the absence of pre-planned or already existing political formations such as parties. On the other side, bottom-up formation refers to their organisational structure. Taken together, spontaneity and bottom-up growth are the hallmarks of councils.

Despite the fact that many councils were formed locally as a result of the issues unique to their contexts, they all shared the same objectives, including deepening democracy, democratising the capitalist economy and advancing self-government practices (Popp-Madsen, 2021, pp. 1-22). On top of that, council movement aimed to establish a democratic socialist society based on participatory councils that were incorporated into a federal system of self-government (Muldoon, 2018, pp. 3-4).

The locations where councils emerged are diverse. They emerged in countries such as France, Russia, Hungary, Germany, Austria, Britain, Italy and Ireland, and although they had different aims due to the contexts and places in which they appeared, they had the same objective of collective class action and social transformation (Gluckstein, 2018, p. 33). Among the most mentioned council examples are the Paris Commune of 1871, the *soviets* appeared during the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the German workers' councils of 1918–1919 during the German Revolution and the Hungarian councils emerged during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution against Soviet totalitarianism (Gluckstein, 2018; Popp-Madsen, 2021). These councils are important not only because they are frequently discussed in the literature but also because Arendt addressed and examined them in her book *On Revolution*. More specifically, the re-emergence of the councils during the Hungarian Revolution prompted Arendt to consider the council system as a viable option (Canovan, 1994, p. 235). For Arendt, councils were the “organs of action” and the “spaces of freedom”, which came into existence out of spontaneity but were always in search of a permanent place within government (Arendt, 1990, pp. 262-264). Councils, therefore, inspired Arendt as participatory political structures.

As I previously mentioned, Arendt was among the theorists who were captivated by the councils that emerged during the times of the French and Hungarian revolutions and the *soviets* of Russian workers. Obviously, these councils were not discussed only by Arendt. The demands of the councils to control a wide range of areas, their resistance to oppressive governments, their demand for participation, and the prominent Marxist thinkers of that period inspired many thinkers, from Arendt to Lefort, from the advocates of participatory democracy to Frankfurt School. However, what is important here is that, among the many socialist-Marxist philosophers who were influenced by the council tradition, Arendt's republican stance makes her views on the council system worth examining. In other words, Arendt's discussion of councils is informed mostly by democratic and participatory sources rather than the glossary of socio-economic relations and class struggles. That said, some authors argued that Arendt intentionally disregarded the working-class character of the councils and distorted the history of modern council movements (e.g., Lederman, 2019; Popp-Madsen, 2021). However, I do not see this as a distortion of the history of council movements or of the founding principles of the councils. Rather, I see Arendt's interpretation as an implicit criticism of their socio-economic features and as a deliberate attempt to highlight their political character. I will argue that it is precisely this novel interpretation that makes Arendt's version theoretically original. To understand the political significance of the council tradition in Arendt, we should consider her critique of representative democracy and the party system.

4.3. Arendt's Critique of Representative Democracy and the Party System

In the previous section, I argued that Arendt was the thinker who provided a thoroughly political interpretation of the council system in complete isolation from its socio-economic aspects. It is now vital to understand that this is partly because Arendt's aim is to prepare the way for her notion of council system as a remedy to representative democracy and the party system, both of which she harshly criticised. Lederman (2015) makes a similar claim when he draws attention to the similarities Arendt's criticism of the party system has with certain political sensibilities of the anarchist tradition, particularly Arendt's view of the council system as an alternative to the party system (p. 255). Because councils emerge from the bottom up and express the demands of ordinary people in contrast to the "ideological and particularistic nature of the parties" (Lederman, 2015, p. 255). However, it might be misleading to establish

a closeness between Arendt and the anarchist tradition because the question was for Arendt to find durable institutions to preserve the revolutionary spirit and free action that created the councils (Canovan, 1994, p. 234).

In her critique of representative democracy, Arendt claims that the system has devolved into an enclosed framework that only permits access to a limited number of people. In addition to this exclusive character of the representative system, the party system which turned politics into a profession for a select few making it inaccessible for people to participate is also responsible for restricting involvement to elections (Sezer and Başkır, 2022, p. 444). Moreover, Arendt stated that:

“Hence the party, whether an extension of parliamentary faction or a creation outside parliament, has been an institution to provide parliamentary government with the required support of the people, whereby it was always understood that the people, through voting, did the supporting, while action remained the prerogative of government.” (Arendt, 1990, p. 271)

In other words, while councils enable people to participate, speak, and act, parties set boundaries and generate an exclusive sphere in which only the elites can join and act. Therefore, we may argue that Arendt’s arguments for the council system prepare the ground for her criticism of representative democracy. But more importantly for my purposes, as I stated previously, Arendt discusses the councils in such a way that she attaches an exclusively political meaning to them. That is, she sees the problems in the institutional structure of our political systems and proposes solutions to the issues brought about by governments that have evolved into party apparatuses. This also leads me to interpret Arendt’s proposal for council democracy, as an institutionalised form of political association, an arena that ensures the freedom to engage in politics and having the decision-making power, as opposed to episodic and fugitive civic interventions. I will elaborate on Arendt’s decidedly political interpretation of councils by addressing some leading conceptual and political concerns that undergird Arendt’s understanding of the council system as well as her political philosophy as a whole.

4.4. Freedom, Action and Speech

Arendt envisioned a bottom-up political structure based on councils that would allow people to participate, deliberate, and act. The precursors to this vision in Arendt's political thought lie in her emphasis on *freedom, action, and speech*. These concepts serve as the cornerstones of Arendt's political thought. The notion of freedom and its vitality for human existence pervades Arendt's works, especially her text *What is Freedom?* (1961) in which she offers an in-depth analysis of the idea. Action, on the other hand, is the activity that Arendt examines in one of her most important works, *The Human Condition* (1998), and is an integral and the most important part of political life. Additionally, speech is another concept that is repeatedly emphasised by Arendt in *The Human Condition* along with action. For Arendt, speech is such a means that accompanies action: through speech and action humans reveal their distinctive characters and leave their mark in the world shared by others. In other words, we convey who we really are only through speech by putting our distinctiveness into words, and we bring it to life through our words and deeds. Now I will go into the specifics of each of these three concepts one by one.

Despite the overwhelming influence of traditional thought kneaded by old experiences on the concept of freedom, Arendt attributes a political meaning by separating freedom from non-domination (Arendt, 1961, p. 148). That is, Arendt draws a distinction between non-political inner freedom and political freedom. The first sort of freedom safeguards inner freedom, offers a place free from intrusion, and protects individuals from the outside world. This "inner freedom" is politically blind as it represents an "estrangement from the world" (Arendt, 1961, p. 146). Whereas the second, political freedom as Arendt argues, is the inception and the reason of politics, and it can only be achieved through action and mutual interaction with others. Because freedom manifests itself not in one's encounter with oneself but with others (Arendt, 1961, p. 148). In Arendt's words:

"Freedom needed, in addition to mere liberation, the company of other men who were in the same state, and it needed a common public space to meet them—a politically organized world, in other words, into which each of the free men could insert himself by word and deed." (Arendt, 1961, p. 148)

Therefore, freedom can be reduced neither to our arbitrary choices nor to our unrestricted acts. Rather, freedom is the activity we perform in the public arena. Furthermore, Arendt warns us not to mistake civil rights for political freedom. She stresses the meaning and importance of political freedom this time with a much stronger emphasis on participation in public affairs in *On Revolution*:

“For political freedom, generally speaking, means the right ‘to be a participator in government’, or it means nothing.” (Arendt, 1990, p. 218)

In this respect, it would not be wrong to say that freedom, in Arendt’s view, is political and is a purely public action that requires active participation in public affairs. Thus, from the significance attached to freedom we can conclude that action—the activity occupies the highest place within *vita activa*—appears as the central locus of political freedom (Arendt, 1990, p. 146; Arendt, 1998, p. 205). As the term’s etymological root implies, action means to begin, to initiate (Arendt, 1998, p. 177). Arendt defines action as a uniquely human potential. That is why she distinguished action from fundamental and routine behaviours such as labour and work and placed it at the top of *vita activa*. When we look at the ranking of human activities, labour occupies the lowest level of *vita activa*. It refers to the activity with which humans supply the basic necessities of life. It does not need the presence of others or a public arrangement. In other words, it is not political at all. Rather, “the human condition of labour is life itself” (Arendt, 1998, p. 7). Work, on the other hand, is what makes us different from many other life forms that also have the capacity for labour. With work, we fabricate and create things that ensure the durability of our existence and leave our fingerprints on the world we live in. For Arendt, work is about fabrication, reification and worldliness. Despite its world-building capacity, work remains below action in the hierarchy of *vita activa*.

Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that a life that is solely dedicated to the supply and satisfaction of the basic necessities of life is far from being active life in the political sense of the term. For instance, everyday behaviours like going to work or engaging in hobbies are not considered actions, nor are the repetitive tasks we must undertake in order to survive. For the action to reveal itself, it needs to have the potential to initiate something, namely, a certain amount of *spontaneity*. This potential for new beginnings makes action unique to our species and thanks to this unusual

feature of action, human beings can initiate new (beginnings), and reveal the distinctive nature of their true selves through this creative impetus (Arendt, 1998, p. 179).

Meanwhile, accompanying this creative power of action is *speech*. Speech, like freedom and action, plays an important role in Arendt's thought. Because the absence of speech would sweep away the revelatory character of action, that is, actions would no longer be capable of revealing one's identity, a process what Arendt calls *disclosure* (Arendt, 1998, pp. 178-179). In other words, speech gives meaning to our actions, enables the expression of our character and *plurality*, thus transforms our behaviours into unique *actions*, making them different from those of other beings. Therefore, we may argue that action and speech serve an indispensable function in political life because it is only through them that humans can reveal their truly political and unique identities.

Finally, just as freedom requires an encounter with others, the revelatory power of action and speech requires a similar intersubjective context, since speech and action manifest themselves in "sheer human togetherness" (Arendt, 1998, p. 180). Furthermore, by seeing action as the highest activity and as a way for human togetherness, she paves the way for her participatory understanding of democracy as opposed to party-based representative politics (D'Entreves, 2019). This manifestation of human togetherness takes place in the physical spaces where people come together, which Arendt calls "spaces of appearances" and exemplifies it through the Greek polis. However, those spaces are not fixed in terms of their location and duration. A space of appearance might emerge whenever people come together with *word* and *deed* and evaporate with the disappearance of the actions that constitute it (Arendt, 1998, p. 199, my emphasis).

4.5. Arendt's Council System: A Permanent Place for Active Citizenship?

In light of my analysis so far, I argue that the reason behind Arendt's endorsement of the council system is intimately linked to her quest for providing lasting institutions for the spaces of appearances. This becomes particularly manifest in Arendt's concluding chapter of her book *On Revolution*, where she criticises the post-revolutionary thought and the framers of the American Constitution despite their

historical victory.

As is well known, Arendt praises the American Revolution owing to its revolutionary spirit that initially succeeded in founding freedom. However, she also remains critical of post-revolutionary thought because of its failure to remember the initiating ethos of the revolution, which resulted in the failure to provide this spirit with a “lasting institution” (Arendt, 1990, p. 232). In other words, in complete agreement with Thomas Jefferson, Arendt criticises the framers of the Constitution for not preserving suitable spaces for political freedom and the experience that was originally crucial in creating “the act of foundation”. Hence, the eventual outcome was that “there was no space reserved, no room left for the exercise of precisely those qualities which had been instrumental in building it.” (Arendt, 1990, p. 232). What Arendt criticised was the loss of institutions that would enable the active and direct participation of the people. This failure resulted in a situation in which only the representatives of the people, not the people themselves, had the opportunity to discuss and negotiate public affairs as well as to make collective decisions, which are the most crucial manifestations of political freedom (Arendt, 1990, p. 235). Here, Arendt’s criticism is directed towards the Senate, one of the most important organs of the representative government in America, as it became the technical tool specifically designed to contain and constrain public opinion with the help of the new constitution.

Furthermore, as a result of this failure, the townships and the town-hall meetings were fading away because no attempt was made by the framers to incorporate them into the constitutional and political framework of the federal republic. That is why Arendt argues that the Constitution, the greatest accomplishment of the Americans, robbed them of their most prized property (Arendt, 1990, p. 239). Consequently, with the help of a small group of experts, it is ensured that the opinions and interests of the masses are purified, and the newly emerged republic is protected “against the confusion of a multitude” (Arendt, 1990, p. 227). Thus, the Senate found its place inside America’s institutional framework as the lasting institution for the opinions that will be expressed and purified through the medium of a group of men. What was missing, however, was the permanent institution of the revolutionary impulse that gave rise to the revolution and led to its success. This problem is highlighted further by Arendt’s comparison between the party system and councils throughout the text.

For Arendt, the revolutionary spirit that created the councils and rebelled against the party system was on the verge of extinction after the revolution and was suppressed again by the representatives, the central government, and the party system. Because the first aim of the founders after the revolution was the creation of the government and its institutions that would maintain the continuity and stability of this new Republic. Although Arendt acknowledges the two-party system's viability and capacity to protect constitutional rights, she argues that it is deficient in giving the citizens the opportunity to become participants in public affairs (Arendt, 1990, p. 268). Moreover, she argues that in such a system where the opportunity to participate is limited, citizens can only hope for their interests to be represented on their behalf. However, actions and opinions remain. Because, as Arendt said, opinions and actions cannot be represented and are only formed by free discussion in the public sphere. As a result, an "oligarchic" structure, to use Arendt's term, has developed because of this system of limited citizen involvement, where a tiny elite possesses public freedom and rules in the interests of the majority (Arendt, 1990, p. 269).

Here, it is important to keep Arendt's cautionary statement in mind which is based on Jefferson's concerns. Jefferson feared that while the constitution and the new Republic provided citizens full sovereignty, they were also deprived of the means by which people might engage in public affairs and the spaces in which to do so. That is why Arendt concludes in the following way:

"The only remedies against the misuse of public power by private individuals lie in the public realm itself, in the light which exhibits each deed enacted within its boundaries, in the very visibility to which it exposes all those who enter it." (Arendt, 1990, p. 253)

The solution proposed by Jefferson to this danger was the creation of small republics through a ward system that would subdivide the counties into wards, allowing each citizen to serve as an acting member in their own government. This was the answer to the issue of integrating these small entities into the state structure of the Union, as well as the counterproposal to the newly established federal government and the Federalist camp. Thus, neighbourhood assemblies and townships, where ideas fuelling the revolution flourished and political activity was born but did not have a place in the

post-revolutionary order, could have been incorporated into the institutional structure.

Arendt assumed the responsibility to tell and remember this *strange and sad story* of the council tradition after being profoundly impressed by Jefferson's ideas and the revolutionary spirit that grew in the councils (Arendt, 1990, p. 255, my emphasis). The primary reason for Arendt's attention towards the council system lies in her understanding of freedom as acting and participating in the government and in her assertion that this freedom can only be preserved in political institutions in which people can participate. Consequently, this view led her to develop her ideas about the councils as permanent places for ongoing citizen participation. Thus, the political significance of Arendt's councils springs from their participatory and deliberative nature: councils are ideal public spaces in which people can participate and deliberate and hence exercise freedom through direct involvement in public affairs. It is precisely this political meaning Arendt attaches to the councils distinguishes her from socialist-Marxist thinkers who advocated the council system based upon its transformative effects on socio-economic relations and class struggles.

Arendt argued that councils held the seeds of a brand-new political order that would enable the establishment of the kind of government that Jefferson envisioned (Arendt, 1990, p. 244). Unfortunately, as competitors for public authority, they were destroyed by the central and centralised administration and ignored by the revolutionary tradition itself (Arendt, 1990, p. 246-249). However, a more detailed analysis of the council system and its eventual disappearance is beyond the scope of this thesis. What is important for this chapter is the affinity between the councils and the public spaces required for public debate and democratic politics.

First of all, councils were spontaneous organs formed by the people. This reflects the unexpected, spontaneous, and transformative characteristic of human action in an Arendtian sense. Second, they were the organs of action, since they continually sought active participation of every person in the country's public affairs. Moreover, for as long as they persisted, "there is no doubt that 'every individual found his own sphere of action and could behold, as it were, with his own eyes his own contribution to the events of the day.'" (Arendt, 1990, p. 263). In other words, these organs not only give each individual a field of action but also offer a field of view where they can *disclose*

their uniqueness. Thus, Arendt stated that councils, in their revolutionary endeavours, appeared as “an entirely new form of government with a new public space for freedom” (Arendt, 1990, p. 249).

Therefore, I argue that councils, like the spaces of appearances, are public spaces formed in spontaneity whenever people come together and served for the practice of freedom, which means, in Arendt’s thinking, participation in public affairs. It is the reason why Arendt insisted on permanent institutions for public participation. They enable people to show themselves in public, act in concert, speak, and deliberate. And this was the idea behind Arendt’s admiration for the council system. She thought that public happiness and political freedom, which were the accomplishments of the American Revolution, should be protected by the institutions. As a result of her concern over the loss of human action and togetherness, Arendt advocated for the institutionalisation of the councils in which citizens may be politically engaged.

Thus, by altering and reviving the way we perceive politics, Arendt reinvented it as a means of reclaiming and exercising freedom and she effectively encapsulated her entire political philosophy through the idea of a council system. Therefore, the council system appears as a representation of Arendt’s quest for a permanent place for the practice as well as the preservation of engaged citizenship and public happiness, which arise from freedom, speech, and action.

4.6. Assessing the Participatory Powers of Institutional Assembly

Having presented the council system and its place in Arendt’s thought, in this section I am going to propose an example to investigate what it would be like if a spontaneously organised group of ordinary people formed assemblies and came to power in the municipal elections by concerting their efforts. In other words, I will attempt to illustrate what it would be like if Arendt’s intellectual legacy survived in a real-life setting (O’Brien, 2018). For this reason, I will examine a community whose history can be traced back to the 15M movement: Barcelona en Comú (also referred to as Barcelona in Common and BeC). Barcelona en Comú was an organisation assembled by ordinary people, some of whom were activists who participated in the 15M movement. It started as a grassroots organisation to win the municipal elections, turned itself into a party, won the elections, and became institutionalised.

There are two reasons why I reviewed this example under the title of Arendt's council system and institutional variety. The first is the affinity we can establish between the demands of the councils that emerged in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries and the reasons for the emergence of today's radical democratic movements. The demands and expectations raised by dissident democratic groups in the present strikingly resemble the democratic and socio-economic demands of the councils that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries. More specifically, just as the demands of the workers, peasants, soldiers and many other people gave rise to the council movement and the formation of revolutionary councils, street movements in Barcelona sparked the development of many grassroots political organisations like Barcelona en Comú.

Second, the emergence of Barcelona en Comú mirrors the spontaneity and bottom-up features that Arendt frequently emphasised in her analysis of councils. The example of Barcelona en Comú is the result of the joint actions of ordinary people with the aim of deepening democracy, producing solutions to social problems, challenging the established political order, and finding a place in the institutional structure by gaining power. In these respects, this example fully coincides with Arendt's idea of council.

Barcelona en Comú emerged as a political organisation made up of many ordinary people who had no political experience and had diverse origins. They came together through the neighbourhood movement with their demands for housing, access to health services, and public education (Barcelona en Comú, 2023). Among the people who were part of the organisation were activists, professionals, young people, migrants, and elders. These people from diverse backgrounds came together for the same goal: "to win back the city en Comú" (Guardian, 2016). This bottom-up formation shares the same characteristics with traditional councils: councils too had their origins in protest movements and upheavals that raised demands for greater democratisation such as combating authoritarian regimes, deepening workplace democracy, and increasing the participation of citizenry in collective decision-making. The causes that created Barcelona en Comú are rooted in a similar radical democratic movement: 15M. This movement was also known as the "Indignados", but they prefer not to be named as such since, as they claim, their demands are "real democracy" and inclusiveness (Azzellini and Sitrin, 2014). As a result of an ongoing disaffection with austerity policies, financial conditions but more significantly representative system, the

movement erupted on May 15, 2011, with participation over 100,000 people in many cities in Spain, under the slogan of “Real Democracy Now!” (Azzellini and Sitrin, 2014). People started to gather in Puerta del Sol in Madrid by organising face-to-face assemblies in the streets and started to form encampments in large public areas such as squares as well as in the back streets. The reason that drove people to take to the streets was their lack of participatory instruments to change and improve their deteriorating living conditions (Azzellini and Sitrin, 2014).

Throughout the protests, many people organised themselves in the streets and established regular assemblies, and the movement quickly expanded throughout the country. These assemblies turned into places for discussion and deliberation, where people sought solutions to social problems through speech and direct action. On June 12, the encampments in The Puerta del Sol dissolved as a result of a consensus reached by the General Assembly of the Plaza, and they decided to reorganise themselves in a way that continued as a neighbourhood movement so that more people could participate (Azzellini and Sitrin, 2014). Some of the encampments continued in the squares. However, this reorganisation at the neighbourhood level was largely overlooked (Azzellini and Sitrin, 2014). Few scholars addressed the impact of social movements’ transmission to the neighbourhood level on municipal organisations even though one of the outstanding results of 15M movement was the emergence of grassroots political platforms which later turned into political parties running for the municipal elections (e.g., Feenstra and Tormey, 2023; Martínez and Wissink, 2022). In four years time, these bottom-up political platforms in seven cities won the municipal elections (Martínez and Wissink, 2022). By forming left-wing majority governments in coalition with parties, these citizen platforms enabled activists from the grassroots to be involved in politics as mayors and councillors (Martínez and Wissink, 2022, p. 659). Barcelona en Comú led by activist Ada Colau was one of them.

The initiation process of Barcelona en Comú first started with the creation of a citizen platform named “Guanyem Barcelona” (Let’s Win Barcelona) in June 2014. They collected signatures and negotiated to reach an agreement with many other parties and citizen platforms to merge under Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona en Comú, 2023). By September 2014, 30,000 people signed the manifesto of “Guanyem Barcelona” and the platform organised meetings with residents of Barcelona to inform people about

the ideals and objectives of the platform (Transformative Cities, 2018).

After the initiation and informative phase of the platform, they set up meetings to create a code of ethics for their future work which would constitute “a new social contract between citizens and those in government” (Transformative Cities, 2018). To this end, the platform came together with the people who had been working in the fields that needed solutions. These meetings were open and transparent to the wider public and conducted through deliberative discussions. I would argue that this aim to create a new social contract between citizens and government represents the transmission aim of the platform in their effort to bridge the communicative gap between public life and spheres of decision-making to produce effective solutions for the city.

In February 2015, Guanyem Barcelona put forward the proposal for convergence under the name “Barcelona en comú” in coalition with ICV-EUiA (Initiative for Catalonia Greens–United and Alternative Left), Podemos Barcelona, Proceso Constituyente and Equo (Transformative Cities, 2018). In March they held open primaries using the Participa platform. This platform enabled people who registered with it to decide the candidate who would represent their district as a councillor, and they selected one individual to head the list of candidates (Transformative Cities, 2018). This was a novelty as it gave people a direct choice for the first time. It also reflects Arendt’s notion of direct participation. Finally, this citizen platform, which started to organise in June 2014, won the elections in May 2015 after an active campaign in a short time. Ada Colau became the first female mayor of Barcelona.

Overall, the platform emerged before the municipal elections with the collective efforts of many different people represents the inclusive and open nature of Barcelona en Comú. Moreover, in the initiation process of the platform, people were able to both participate in and observe the process. In the code of ethics they created, Barcelona en Comú states that the platform is committed to ensuring their platform is accessible to citizens. In this regard, this coincides with the inclusive and open nature of this platform. This open and inclusive attitude makes their actions open to the wider public, thereby making them more transparent and serving accountability as well as communication purposes.

In addition, the fact that the initiation process as well as the election process was carried out with participatory and deliberative practices is one of the prominent features of the platform. Finally, participatory, inclusive, deliberative and transmission capacities are qualities that increase the agenda-setting power of citizens since the platform allowed them to become directly involved in political action at the local level.

4.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented Arendt's council system and provided an illustration to my discussion. Notwithstanding the participatory character of the councils and the neighbourhood citizen platform as in the case of Barcelona, I would argue that too much emphasis on micro participatory mechanisms has the danger of containing the political environment in a small place. In addition, these small micro-structures can make us forget that we are part of a larger community. In addition, after a while, institutional structures may also turn into the kind that Arendt criticises. That is, they can become the privilege of a small group. Finally, I also argue that citizen initiatives that sacrifice their autonomy for the sake of greater institutionalisation will eventually begin to act as an institution of the state and lose their independence altogether. Therefore, this brings me closer to the commentators who see Arendt's idea of the council as a utopian project.

In the next section, I will present a vision of democratic politics which sees democracy as a political culture of civic activism as well as a well-organised institutional and constitutional structure, emphasising particularly the importance of participation through voluntary associations. I will discuss whether this idea can constitute a more realistic alternative to Arendt's council system, whether it offers a more effective participatory opportunity with its voluntary nature than Arendt's institutionalised assemblies.

CHAPTER 5: THE ASSOCIATIONAL VISION OF ASSEMBLY DEMOCRACY

5.1. Introduction

Alexis de Tocqueville was one of the most preeminent thinkers of the 19th century and had a notable view of democracy. Considering the challenges democracies face today, it is necessary to pay attention to Tocqueville, who wrote extensively about democracy almost 190 years ago on both its vices and virtues. In this chapter, I will mainly focus on the democratic importance of voluntary associations and evaluate their participatory powers. I will explore this topic through the theoretical lens of Tocqueville, whose views on the crucial role played by associational life in a democracy are noteworthy. First, I will try to explain the meaning of democracy in Tocqueville's political thought. Then I will continue with the significance of associations. After that, I will offer an assessment of the participatory powers of the associational variety of assembly democracy with an illustration from Turkey: "Kazdağı Association for the Preservation of Natural and Cultural Resources". More specifically, I will argue that democracy requires the act of voluntarily coming together to address public grievances.

5.2. Tocqueville's Road to America

As a member of the Norman nobility, Tocqueville saw the irreversible demise of the aristocracy. He understood that the period of aristocracy was drawing to a close and that a new era was about to begin (Siedentop, 1994). What was beginning was a *democratic revolution*, and nowhere was it moving faster than in France (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 3-7, my emphasis). But this rapid progress, according to Tocqueville, has been "haphazard" and has had detrimental effects. If we look at post-revolutionary France, we see the reasons behind Tocqueville's views. Following the French Revolution, all social classes based on privileges were destroyed, and all powers were subordinated to the central government. Thus, a modern nation-state with a centralised government was established in France. This administrative centralisation resulted in the destruction of all intermediary and civil institutions and fused all the powers in one place. Starting from his observations regarding the French Revolution, Tocqueville argued that the revolution created a much more powerful and centralised structure than it overthrew.

Moreover, the elimination of civil and intermediary institutions marked the irreversible loss of both local autonomy and liberties for Tocqueville. This was worrying for Tocqueville, whose greatest concern and passion was liberty.

But what prompted Tocqueville, an aristocratic descendant, to visit America in the 19th century? Tocqueville's apparent reason for going to America was to study the penitentiary system. However, he was actually wondering why the revolution that had driven France through painful transformation had taken place in America more gently and peacefully. As someone who was directly affected by the change created by the revolution and the violence that brought his family to an end, he was thinking about how we could complete this democratic revolution with a smooth transition like in America. Therefore, he travelled to America with his friend Gustave de Beaumont to give advice to his home country and to observe the impulse that created the spirit of this new era. That is why, Tocqueville's writings were directed towards France as political lessons to be drawn from America's experience (Jaume, 2013; Mélonio, 2006; Villa, 2017).

Tocqueville's visit to America culminated in the publication of his two-volume work, *Democracy in America*. There is a general tendency among many contemporary readers, especially Americans, to interpret Tocqueville's book as a work of fascination with American democracy. This misinterpretation leads many readers to mistake Tocqueville's work as merely a story about American democracy. However, *Democracy in America* is not just a book written to examine America's democracy, nor is it a work of praise as a result of admiration for it.

In the introductory chapter of his book, Tocqueville makes it clear that the reason for his trip is not to make a mere observation nor his trip triggered by out of a curiosity. He also warns his readers that the book they are about to read is not a panegyric one. Adding that he does not prefer one form of government to another, Tocqueville also states that he does not come to a clear judgment as to whether the social revolution he observed was good or bad. In short, he states that he is looking for ways to see democracy itself, to understand its inner side, and to make it useful for French society by looking at the results it creates, without making any value judgments about democracy in America. Therefore, to mention once again, what drove Tocqueville to

go to the other side of the Atlantic is to look for lessons from which France might profit (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 14).

When Tocqueville first came in America, he was astonished by the *equality of conditions*, as he wrote in the introduction to his book. He observed that this equal state was the source and cause of many factual realities in the country. Besides, it was a powerful factor shaping the public spirit, political *mores*, laws and habits in the American society. That is, he was referring to a *democratic revolution* which is now spreading all over the world with a different appearance than in France. Accordingly, Tocqueville devoted the first volume of his magnum opus to analysing America's political system and its institutions, while in the second volume he focused on how democracy affected the thoughts, sentiments and intellect of American society.

Tocqueville's political thought on democracy is surrounded by different themes derived from his observations on his trip to America as well as the changes triggered by the French Revolution that brought his family to a tragic end. As a result, his narrative provides us with various interpretations of democracy. For some authors, Tocqueville's democracy is a vague, ambivalent, and complex notion from which we can draw more than one meaning (e.g., Jaume, 2013; Lamberti 1989; Schleifer, 2012; Villa, 2017). For instance, Lamberti (1989) focuses on the relation between democracy and revolution in Tocqueville's writings to better grasp the mentality behind his thought. As Lamberti suggests, Tocqueville's use of democracy not only to refer to the differences between France and America, but also as both a synonym and antonym of revolution may be a likely reason why Lamberti viewed Tocqueville's democracy as ambivalent (Lamberti, 1989, p. 5).

But for my purposes, I will trace three meanings that we can draw from Tocqueville's writings. The first is democracy as a social condition in which equality reigns over societal norms. The second is democracy as a form of government, a set of institutional arrangements and laws. And the third one is democracy as a whole way of life shaped by the *mores*, in which the habit of coming together to form an association with fellow citizens to address issues of public concern and combat the weaknesses of individualism is at the heart of this democratic way of life. After briefly touching upon the first two meanings, I will put the emphasis on the third one, as its way of

assembling constitutes the second variety of assembly democracy, namely the associational branch. To this end, I will focus on associations in America from Tocqueville's narrative. Another reason for my emphasis on this third conception of democracy is that the habit of assembling to form an association is not only a democratic practice but also a key to unlocking complexities and combating the malaises that might be brought on by democracy itself. Therefore, it is highly essential to look at some of Tocqueville's basic notions to understand his methodology in articulating his ideas and the conception of democracy in his mind.

5.3. Tocqueville's Democracy

Given the breadth of this book, it seems absurd to suggest that it is incredibly difficult to describe democracy based on the text of a thinker who published a two-volume treatise on democracy. However, Tocqueville uses many expressions and comparisons when describing democracy. This gives his views on democracy a somewhat complicated yet all-encompassing definition. It is this sophisticated analysis of society and holistic approach that makes Tocqueville's understanding of democracy so difficult to define. Briefly, Tocqueville defined democracy as both a social situation, a form of government, and a way of life. This definition places Tocqueville in a different place in the theory of democracy. Now I will try to explain the nature of democracy in Tocqueville's mind based on the main themes he used while describing democracy in America.

The principle of *equality of conditions* is the first expression that Tocqueville uses to describe democracy, and this was the one that most appealed to him when he landed in the new world.

“Among the new things that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, none struck me more forcefully than the equality of conditions. I readily discovered what a prodigious influence this basic fact exerts on the workings of society. It imparts a certain direction to the public spirit and a certain shape to laws, establishes new maxims for governing, and fosters distinctive habits in the governed.” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 3)

This passage is important as it perfectly captures the democratic condition in

Tocqueville's expression and involves the other factors influenced by this equal condition in America. That is, equality of conditions forms society's behaviour, laws, and way of life of the people. For Tocqueville, this is the "original fact" which is the source of all other facts (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 3). We can even say that Tocqueville uses equality and democracy as synonyms (Schleifer, 2012, p. 56).

However, this equality of conditions should not be thought of as the absence of any inequality, injustice or poverty in the society. Tocqueville did not presume that all members of American society were equally privileged in terms of their socioeconomic situation, opportunities, or social standing. What, then, was this equality of conditions? As I previously mentioned, Tocqueville wrote with France in mind, hoping to draw political conclusions from American experience. Therefore, while conveying his observations to the reader, he often resorted to a comparative approach and aimed to show the contrasts between France and America. What Tocqueville had in mind was this comparison of the social conditions of two different types of people: those who were in constant change and dynamism and those who were part of the permanent hierarchy (Mansfield, 2010, p. 19). In other words, the state of equality of conditions in America pointed to the absence of a class based and aristocratic social condition that had long ruled France and the rest of Europe, something that France destroyed in 1789 (Villa, 2017, p. 177). As Schleifer (2012) pointed out, equality for Tocqueville was not a state of social or economic "sameness" but a state that paved the way for social and economic mobility (p. 59). That is why this original fact, equality of conditions, is not a political regime but a social condition that has become the main characteristic of democratic societies (Manent, 1996, p. 2).

Furthermore, Tocqueville devotes a particular attention to the importance of "point of departures" for the future of societies. By point of departures, Tocqueville refers to the conditions surrounding a nation's birth. He contends that the conditions under which a nation is born have an impact on its future. Tocqueville refers to these conditions, which form the point of departures of societies, as *circumstances*. For instance, the geographical location of the American continent made it easier for the settlers to create a society of their own, cutting off their connection with their ancestors in the old world. In other words, they were able to establish a society on completely new foundations (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 30).

Tocqueville states that, in establishing this new society, the first immigrants had different aims, but they also shared some common characteristics. The language was one of them. All the settlers spoke the same language. At the same time, their political consciousness had undergone much more rigorous training as a result of the bloody wars they had witnessed in the countries they came from. Therefore, they had more knowledge and interest in notions of rights and liberties than other Europeans. Thus, Tocqueville asserts that local government, that fertile gem of free institutions, had already been firmly embedded in English habits by the time of the first immigrations (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 33). In other words, these first immigrants, who called themselves “Puritans”, came to America to triumph an idea born from their republican and democratic passions, with the awareness of political freedom brought by local institutions in their minds (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 37). The immigrants in the New England states had the opportunity to govern themselves and to be involved in public affairs, provided they did not conflict with the laws of their homeland. According to Tocqueville, this was the reason for the active, democratic and republican political life in the New England states founded by the Puritans.

These were the traits of the first immigrants who founded the New England states, and they formed the basis of circumstances of Americans. Moreover, Tocqueville adds that by observing the point of departures we can see the sources that shaped the laws, habits, customs, prejudices and national character of a nation. To put it another way, he underlines the importance of looking at a country’s points of departure in order to comprehend its social state and laws. That is why, after circumstances, Tocqueville emphasises the influence of laws and mores on the success of American democracy.

Tocqueville defines laws as the legal, political, institutional, and constitutional structure and the set of procedures created by the lawmakers in society (Schleifer, 2012, p. 51). In America, the lawmakers are the people themselves. I have mentioned that Tocqueville emphasised equality of conditions had given certain shape to laws. That is, with the equality promoted by the democratic revolution, every member of society has become a legislator. This also refers to the idea of popular sovereignty exists in America.

Moreover, in the chapter eight of the book, Tocqueville explained the success of American democracy by making a detailed constitutional analysis of America. For Tocqueville, the success of democracy in America in term of the influence of the laws, lies in its federal constitution, which divides sovereignty into two levels so that the states of the union continue to govern themselves. From his constitutional analysis, we can see both Tocqueville's interest in the American constitution and his constitutionalist approach in general. But Tocqueville's constitutionalism is beyond the scope of this thesis. From here, what we can see as the basis of Tocqueville's constitutional approach lies in his praise for the judicial power in America, as the constitution serves to correct the flaws of American democracy and balance the impulses of the majority (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 331).

After mentioning circumstances and laws, Tocqueville highlights the value of mores. It is a challenging task to define the concept of mores. However, it plays a crucial role in Tocqueville's analysis and his political philosophy. Mores often defined as the entirety of a nation's habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, behaviours and attitudes. By mores, Tocqueville refers not only to the habits of the heart, but also habits of the mind. Thus, he defines mores as "the whole moral and intellectual state of a people" (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 331). He emphasises that mores are more important than circumstances and laws, for the success and continuity of democracy in America. In other words, mores had a greater impact on the way nations developed than legal, constitutional, or physical causes (Schleifer, 2012, p. 52). As I previously mentioned, Puritans had the habit of self-government at the local level, which turned out to be the habit of association in the New England Towns. In this respect, the mores of the New England settlers influenced the formation of American institutions (Siedentop, 1994, p. 55). Since mores are of greater importance to the success of democracy, they will be the most certain guarantees against the dangers posed by democracy's flaws (Schleifer, 2012). I will expand upon this later in the section on associations.

Tocqueville stated that in order to grasp a society's social state and laws, one must look at the point of departures. After considering the origins of American society as well as the circumstances, laws, and mores that constitute the basis of its social state, what was the social state of Americans?

Tocqueville explicitly makes it clear that the “democratic” character from the birth of the colonies constitutes the social state of the Americans (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 52). This social state expresses the state of absolute equality in America, where the aristocracy, that is, the unequal social order, has never existed. But according to Tocqueville, it was the law of inheritance that took equality to the next level. The law of equal partition created by the law of inheritance prevented families from transferring their property to future generations without dividing it. Thus, the land is divided into small pieces, destroying the absolute ownership of the families on the land. According to Tocqueville, the law of equal partition proceeds in two ways: first, it affects the property, it also affects the people. Second, while it is effective on the people, it also has an effect on the property. In both cases, it succeeds in destroying wealth and the unequal order created by wealth by inflicting a heavy blow on the transfer of property (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 56).

The political consequences of such a social state are also obvious for Tocqueville. In societies with a democratic social state, there is a fondness for liberty. However, liberty is not the driving force behind this passion. Their real passion is equality. This equal social status also makes them powerless on their own. In such a situation, the only option for people equally powerless to defend liberty against absolute power is to join forces (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 60-61). But according to Tocqueville, the Anglo-Americans were lucky enough to succeed in escaping absolute power. Because “Their circumstances, background, enlightenment, and, most of all, mores enabled them to establish and maintain the sovereignty of the people” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 61).

From the social state of the Americans, we can deduce the second meaning of Tocqueville’s *Democracy*: democracy as a system of institutions and laws whose guiding principle is the idea of popular sovereignty. This principle of popular sovereignty is the result of an egalitarian social state of the Americans. That is why, it is embedded in every aspect of life. In Tocqueville’s words:

“In America, the principle of popular sovereignty is not, as in certain nations, hidden or sterile; it is recognized by mores, proclaimed by laws. It expands with freedom’s expansion and meets no obstacle on the way to its ultimate ends.” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 62)

According to Tocqueville, the “dogma of popular sovereignty” emerged from below, first impacting the towns and later the government. That is, all men strove for its victory, it ultimately prevailed and became “the law of laws” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 63).

“There, society acts by itself and on itself. No power exists but within its bosom. Virtually no one is to be found who dares to conceive, much less to express, the idea of seeking power from another source. The people participate in the drafting of the laws through the choice of legislators and in their enforcement through the election of agents of the executive power. So feeble and limited is the share of government left to the administration, and so much does the latter reflect its popular origins and obey the power from which it emanates, that it is fair to say that the people govern themselves. The people reign over the American political world as God reigns over the universe. They are the cause and end of all things; everything proceeds from them, and to them everything returns.” (Tocqueville, 2004, pp. 64-65)

Therefore, the principle of popular sovereignty permeated the way of life, laws, institutions and mores of the Americans, becoming the social condition that governs American political life.

Equality of conditions and the social state of Americans do, however, provide certain challenges, like anything else. Apart from being the first political scientist, Tocqueville was a great sociologist who was able to see both the virtues and the vices of the social condition that he scrutinised. “Tyranny of the majority” was among the pathologies of democracy Tocqueville had foreseen. He stated that given America’s social condition and political structure, it is extremely likely that a party will ascend to a dominating position and retain absolute power. To illustrate this, he gives the example of the legislative branch in America:

“Of all political powers, the legislature is the one that obeys the majority most willingly. Americans wanted members of the legislature to be elected directly by the people, and for a very short term, so as to oblige representatives to conform not only to the general views but also to the daily passions of their

constituents. They recruited members of both houses from the same classes and elected them in the same way, so that shifts in the legislative body are almost as rapid and no less irresistible than in a single assembly. Having constituted the legislature in this way, they concentrated nearly all of government in its hands.” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 283)

As a result, the law gradually diminished the naturally weak forces, while adding strength to the naturally strong ones (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 283).

Furthermore, Tocqueville adds another factor that contributes to the power of the majority: the belief that a large number of people possess greater wisdom and enlightenment. Thus, the majority began to be seen as omnipotent and the reason for that is based on this idea:

“The moral ascendancy of the majority rests in part on the idea that there is more enlightenment and wisdom in an assembly of many than in the mind of one, or that the number of legislators matters more than the manner of their selection.” (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 285)

This is due to their democratic and equal characteristics which push democratic nations to follow the majority. Because in democratic nations there exist no powerful individuals or groups whose ideas may be followed, unlike in aristocratic nations. This necessitates democratic societies to rely on the wisdom of the majority.

Tocqueville also considers the effects of the tyranny of the majority on thought. According to him, tyranny directly targets the human soul by ignoring the body. In other words, the tyranny of the majority in democratic societies is a soft despotism that directly establishes moral dominance and takes over hearts, minds and souls in an inconspicuous way without resorting to hard power. Thus, according to Tocqueville, this unprecedented despotism of the kind that threatens democratic societies “...would be more extensive and more mild, and it would degrade men without tormenting them” (Tocqueville, 2004, pp. 817-818). But what is the source of this soft despotism for Tocqueville? What soft despotism finds strength in is the “tutelary power”, which rises above people and aims to protect their passions, ensure their safety, and meet their

needs (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 818). This tutelary power claims that it works for people's happiness but strives to be the sole authority on this happiness (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 818). Why shouldn't this power that does all this, Tocqueville asks, save people the trouble of thinking and acting? Therefore, this tutelary power makes the use of free will and reason more and more futile. In such a case, the use of the will is not overtly hindered but directed. In addition to all these, it does not prohibit things but establishes mechanisms to prevent their formation from the beginning. It does not force people to do anything, but it keeps them from acting under the guidance of their own free will (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 818-819).

Another consequence of the democratic social condition that Tocqueville draws our attention is excessive individualism. This social condition, democracy, creates a kind of state of nature in which individuals are not in conflict, but their bonds are quite loose (Mansfield, 2010, p. 20). Tocqueville argues that individualism is a new sentiment that springs from equality of conditions, and the sense of individualism created by the phenomenon of equality, which is inherent in democratic societies, prompts every citizen to break away from the community to which they belong and to return to themselves (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 585). Eventually, excessive individualism breeds isolationism, the one that despotism likes the most, which "looks upon the isolation of men as the surest guarantee of its own duration and ordinarily does all it can to ensure that isolation" (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 590).

5.4. Cure for the Democratic Malaise: Associations

Given the social condition that pushes people towards extreme individualism and the dangers that this social condition tends towards, such as the tyranny of the majority and soft despotism, associations seem to Tocqueville to be the most important tools against the threats arising from democracy's flaws. Moreover, freedom of association for Tocqueville is an inalienable right, like many fundamental rights. In this regard, Mansfield reveals a different aspect of Tocqueville's liberalism and argues that unlike typical liberals who defend individualism as not obeying the majority, Tocqueville draws attention to the benefits of associating in liberal societies (Mansfield, 2010, p. 25).

Tocqueville refers to two distinctive forms of associations in his book: political and civil, both of which are motivated by the same associational habit. First, Tocqueville draws a picture of political associations in the fourth chapter of the first volume, and he turns his attention to civil associations in chapter five of the second part of the second volume. To begin with, Tocqueville had a broad concept of associations in mind, and he mentioned the use of associations for various purposes. Political associations were Tocqueville's first type of association to include government bodies such as townships, counties, and other permanent institutions of the U.S. government. On the other hand, civil associations are the second type of Tocqueville's classification and plays a key role in America's associational activities. These associations are formed with the initiative of individuals, unlike the natural character of political associations, and they are not political at all for Tocqueville. But throughout the book, there is no clear distinction between political and civil associations, and Tocqueville generally refers to the general theory of associational activity rather than drawing bold lines among them. Besides, I argue that associations that are formed through the sole initiatives of individuals for achieving an end or addressing a problem have definitely a political character. On that note, I will proceed with the general characteristics of associations and associational habit peculiar to America which also has a central place in Tocqueville's notion of political liberty.

Tocqueville describes associations of all kinds as *deliberative* and *improvised* assemblies which produce an executive power that would offer solutions before people falling in need of authority (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 215, my emphasis). This is due to the fact that Americans avoid appealing to social power and ultimately try to find the solution among themselves. Associations consist of individuals who assemble together to adhere to certain ideas and doctrines and work to seek the advancement of these doctrines. By coming together, people learn from each other and exert their efforts to achieve their goals. For Tocqueville, associations bring divergent minds together, enabling them to see each other and exchange their views. In this respect, associations are deliberative bodies that offer face-to-face interaction for citizens to discuss their views and allow the most reasonable to prevail. Moreover, associations not only serve as places for free discussion but also as public spaces to allow competition among ideas, and in this way, they help break the *moral ascendancy* of the majority (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 220, my emphasis).

Another feature of associations is that they bring together people of all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and perspectives. In this way, people continually collaborate to serve the public interest by distributing books, organising seminars, constructing schools and hospitals (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 595). As I previously mentioned, Tocqueville has a broad concept of associational activity that includes government branches in America, especially those of local government, namely the New England Towns. Towns are one of the three centres of administration, along with counties and states. Tocqueville approaches towns first of all as localities (communes) that arise whenever people come together, where we might find the roots of all kingdoms and republics (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 67). However, despite the natural and prevalent character of localities, local independence is a rarity. As Tocqueville argues, for local independence to be acknowledged and protected, it needs to be integrated into the habits and ideas of a nation. Otherwise, it is doomed to destruction and oblivion. And for Tocqueville, America was the only place at that time where local independence was practiced and had become a part of American habits. Tocqueville admires the New England Township model because it is emerged among people, and individuals act on their behalf without representatives. In this way, towns act like elementary schools of liberty, and these local entities enable people to govern themselves and pave the way for the actual practice of freedom in a Tocquevillian sense. Because according to Tocqueville, liberty needs to start from the bottom and flourish itself to the top. That's why for liberty to be fully realized, people need to have a say in public affairs first at the local level. In this respect, towns are the pathways to liberty for Tocqueville. For Tocqueville, this import from the English colonies is one of the principal ideas which today form the basis of the social condition of the Americans. In other words, the logic behind the New England Townships at the local level perpetuated a whole habit of association in America. Although associational habits of all kinds, including townships, are English imports, their practice has become "habitual and customary" in America (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 218).

Therefore, these features provide us the third meaning, democracy as "the boundless skill of Americans in setting large numbers of people a common goal and inducing them to strive towards that goal voluntarily" (Tocqueville, 2004, p. 595), which Tocqueville admired when he started to examine American society. This was the associational habit of the Americans which spread itself through a variety of

associations.

In addition to being the most certain guarantees against the tyranny of the majority, what other benefits do associations have? Robert D. Putnam (2001) touches upon two kinds of benefits that associations have: one is external, and the other is internal. External benefits relate to society as a whole, while internal benefits have influence over individuals themselves. Externally, associations provide people with opportunities for voicing their demands while safeguarding them from abuses of power (Putnam, 2001, p. 338). Additionally, what circulates within these associations is political knowledge, making associations discussion hubs where public affairs are discussed (Putnam, 2001, p. 338). Putnam addressed the internal benefits of associations by referring to Tocqueville, stating that they foster among its members “habits of cooperation and public-spiritedness” which are critical components of a vibrant public life (Putnam, 2001, p. 338). More crucially, Putnam continues, associations serve as the “schools of democracy” where individuals may develop their civic competence while also keeping them from becoming extremists (Putnam, 2001, p. 338).

Overall, associations create barriers against the majority’s moral and intellectual domination, fosters public spirit and combats individualism. Plus, they act as free schools of democracy where people can learn from each other. However, more significantly for the founding arguments of my thesis, associations can serve as the means for political participation when the ballot box could not reach, and the majority has already taken the lead. In such a case, it becomes much more vital for citizens to assemble and combine all their efforts to utter their demands, disagree, or protect what is at stake. Through this, there appears a collective power and “there is nothing the human will despairs of achieving through the free action of the collective power of individuals.” (Tocqueville, 2044, pp. 215-216).

5.5. Assessing the Participatory Powers of Associational Assembly

The sketch of associations in Tocqueville’s mind represents the Associational variety of Assembly democracy as they found among the joint efforts of people, provides opportunities for face-to-face deliberation. To illustrate my discussion, I will introduce a local association from Kazdağı region, and I will evaluate its participatory aspect

using the participatory powers I have presented in chapter 3.

The “Kazdağı Association for the Preservation of Natural and Cultural Resources” was founded in 2012 to safeguard Turkey’s natural and cultural assets. Specifically, they work to safeguard Kazdağı region’s cultural and ecological resources as well its surroundings. The reason why I chose this association as an example is that the association carries out voluntary and active work at the local level, and in addition, citizens come together and demonstrate their will in order to protect the environment in line with its founding purposes.

Deliberation is certainly among the virtues of the association. Several theorists argued that associations may be seen as deliberative forums that allow the free discussion of different views. The majority of the 20 articles in the association’s founding principles serve as examples of deliberative democracy. For instance, the meetings of the association are held face-to-face, and the decisions are taken by the method of persuasion as a result of the exchange of ideas and consultations, not by sticking to majority rule. Moreover, constantly exchanging ideas and educating the members of the association on issues such as persuasion and communication skills show that the association provides the necessary conditions for healthy deliberation.

Inclusiveness is one of the requirements of democratic legitimacy as well as one of the characteristics of associations. In other words, associations welcome all the individuals who wants to become a part of that association. In this respect, voluntary associations are open to all and Kazdağı association is an inclusive association that includes every citizen who wants to participate in life advocacy as long as they act in line with the principles of the association (Kazdağı Dođal ve Kltrel Varlıkları Koruma Derneđi, 2023). Members of the association include retirees, young people, women and men, environmental experts, villagers and people from many professions and social backgrounds. Furthermore, the number of women who are members of the association and actively participate is extremely significant. In this respect, the association not only meets the requirements of democratic legitimacy but also it incorporates women’s epistemic values and information that women can provide for environmental activism (Anderson, 2006).

Furthermore, transparency lies among the principles of the association and as it is stated, being transparent and accountable at every stage is one of the requirements of the association. Additionally, we may state that the association's inclusivity has an impact on its transparency. Accordingly, the inclusive aspect of the association also makes it transparent and reliable.

Furthermore, transmission capacity of associations, namely being the mechanism between the state and the society may be the most peculiar aspect of associations. As it is known, associations are voluntary organizations that are intended to act as a bridge between the state and society. Because where there is no alternative, associations intervene and transmit the needs and demands of citizens to the formal spheres of decision-making. Kazdağı Association has served as an effective means of transmission by bringing many problems to the agenda and winning the rightful lawsuits it has brought to the political agenda. For instance, the association has opened 11 advocacy cases so far, and two of them have been given a stay of execution. By actively following the lawsuits and environmental activities, they examine the changed ÇED reports in detail, and in the case of decisions that will harm the environment, they start the litigation process again by filing a lawsuit and associating with many other associations in the region. Moreover, it is among the factors that increase this transmission capacity that they communicate with local governments and relevant public institutions as much as possible and cooperate with projects in the fields of activity of the association.

Kazdağı association is not only a tool for togetherness but also actively engages in life and ecology activism and currently conducts nine environmental campaigns. In addition, there are four projects they have carried out so far and three of them have been completed. In addition, the association contributes to increasing its influence and spreading environmental activism widely by organising cultural and artistic activities in the surrounding area, while at the same time exhibiting one of the best examples of social solidarity. With the concert events they organise, Kazdağı konserleri (Kazdağı concerts), they aim to meet the music needs in the Gulf region. By routinely hosting breakfast and second-hand goods donation events, they provide an example of social responsibility and unity. Moreover, they enable both the flow of information and the exchange of opinions amongst people with the talks given on specific days of the year.

All activities of the association appear to be examples of effective solidarity and active citizenship. As described by Tocqueville, one of the most significant tools of democracy is the ability to come together in associations in order to resist the tyranny of the majority. Thus, people who come together through joint actions raise their voices against oppression and contribute to the achievement of the common good through voluntary assemblies they have established. In addition to all these, as in the case of Kazdağı, local and national associations not only ensure the protection of the country's natural and cultural assets but also provide an example of solidarity and observance on a local scale by standing against the environmental intrusions that may be overlooked by many people far from the region. All these contribute to the advancement of democracy by improving the civic awareness of citizens who participate in associations. Finally, and most importantly, associations constitute the most important part of political participation, apart from elections, in terms of being open to the participation of many people, acting together to produce effective results, and forming public opinion through the exchange of ideas.

5.6. Conclusion

In this section, I tried to explain Tocqueville's understanding of democracy. While doing this, I emphasised the value of associations in democracies and illustrated this with an association from Turkey. Contrary to popular belief, an active civil society can also be an effective tool for political participation. Also, since they are not state-based institutionalised mechanisms, their capacity to maintain their independence is higher than institutionalised ones. In the next section, I will present a completely different understanding of assembly democracy and assess the participatory powers of this variety with an example from Turkey.

CHAPTER 6: THE FUGITIVE VISION OF ASSEMBLY DEMOCRACY

6.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to present the last variety of assembly democracy. The arguments presented in this chapter are different from the previous ones. In the first and second varieties of assembly democracy, I presented the views in favour of institutionalising participatory organs as well as democratising the institutions so that the wider public can participate in them. Also, in the previous chapter, I mentioned Tocqueville's views regarding the importance of local institutions and associations in their ability to foster participation and civic engagement. However, this chapter starts with a strong critique of institutions on the grounds that they impose restrictions on democracy's inherent potential. For this purpose, I will introduce a different conception of democracy that rejects the mainstream formulation. I named this variety "Fugitive" with reference to Sheldon Wolin's notion of democracy, which he presented in his 1994 article "Fugitive Democracy". By way of conclusion to this chapter, I will try to deepen my discussion of the fugitive variety and assess its participatory powers with an illustrative example from Turkey. In short, the major purpose of this chapter is to present democratic moments that emerge outside mainstream and well-established institutions. My choice of Sheldon Wolin as the guiding theorist for this chapter is due to his well-known critical attitude towards constitutional and representative democracy.

6.2. Politics and the Political

To begin with, Sheldon Wolin's understanding of democracy constitutes a rejection of the mainstream approach that I outlined as minimal accounts of democracy in the second chapter of my thesis. Wolin has a different approach to democracy at the centre of which lies the distinction between *politics* and *the political*. Politics, according to Wolin, refers to official acts bounded by formal structures, institutional processes, and a sphere of decision-making where public officials possess decision making power (Wolin, 1994, p. 11). The political, on the other hand, refers to the "moments of commonality" in which collective power of the populace is exercised to advance or defend the common good (Wolin, 1994, p. 11). In other words, Wolin signifies the rare and episodic character of the political while mentioning the permanent and eternal

nature of politics. This distinction paves the way to Wolin's concept of fugitive democracy. Thus, for Wolin:

"...democracy is a project concerned with the political potentialities of ordinary citizens, that is with their possibilities for becoming political beings through the self- discovery of common concerns and of modes of action for realizing them." (Wolin, 1994, p. 11)

This understanding represents a break from the traditional conceptions as it detaches democracy from elections and institutional arrangements as well as from the formal spheres of decision-making, administrative duties and many other governmental tasks and places it in the rare moments that occasionally occur when ordinary people come together, act as a collective actor, discover their commonalities and concert their powers.

6.3. In the Grip of Boundaries and the Constitution: Fugitive Democracy

In order to understand what exactly Wolin means by fugitive democracy and why it is "destined to be a moment rather than a form" (Wolin, 1994, p. 19), we should first comprehend two key notions central to Wolin's vision: boundaries and constitution. Wolin explains that the concept of boundaries is complicated not just because it indicates identification, exclusion, or containment but also because they are associated with the state, which is the "bearer of the political" (Wolin, 1994, p. 11). According to Wolin, borders are the expression of contextualization, and he says that contextualization in politics means the domestication of politics in two ways. The first of these refers to the formation of an internal politics embedded in practices and forms, and the second refers to the literal meaning of domestication, that is, to bring under control and tame (Wolin, 1994, pp. 12-13). So, how do boundaries function, what do they accomplish, and how do they relate to democracy in Wolin's opinion? Boundaries are a metaphor for containment, and the reality hidden behind this metaphor is the containment of democracy, with the constitution serving as the fundamental boundary (Wolin, 1994, p. 13). In other words, according to Wolin, the constitution limits democracy by containing it and putting it in a form that it determines.

In contemporary political theory and practice, democracy has come to be identified with the constitution and is now referred to as “constitutional democracy” where the two is seen as “co-original” and the absence of one would jeopardise the survival of the other (Habermas, 2001). According to Wolin, this is the point at which democracy is incorporated into a constitution and, as a result, democracy and constitution are perceived as naturally belonging together (Wolin, 1994, p. 13). Wolin finds this development alarming and deeply problematic, since the indissociable vision of democracy and the constitution has resulted in the limitation of democracy by the constitution. In other words, the constitution has turned into a tool that determines the amount of democratic politics (Wolin, 1994, p. 14).

“Thus a constitution in setting limits to politics sets limits as well to democracy, constituting it in ways compatible with and legitimating of the dominant power groups in the society. Constitutions are not only about what is legal and what illegal political activity, but they regulate the amount of politics, the temporal rhythms or periodicity of politics, and they give it ritualistic forms, e.g., every four years the “voice of the people” is given the opportunity to “speak” by entering an appropriate mark beside the name of one or another presidential candidate.” (Wolin, 1994, p. 14)

As it is seen in the passage, the constitution is presented by Wolin as one of the most crucial elements that sets limits on democracy and regulates the amount of democratic politics. This brings us to the situation Wolin mentioned at the beginning of his essay: in the current order, *the political* begins to be regulated under the constitution and the state, of which the latter has become the “bearer of the political”.

Moreover, this “problem” of boundedness by the constitution reminds us of the electoral process inherent in constitutional democracies. That is, constitution determines the time and place of democratic politics to come to surface in every four or five years with elections. With American federalism in mind, Wolin gives the example of the presidency as the highest branch of constitutional democracy. He argues that even though the demos has no real influence over the president’s decisions, voting is kept as a ritual to maintain the illusion of continuous political activity initiated by democratic elections and to fall back on when the president feels the need to secure

the popular support (Wolin, 1994, p. 14). As a result, the government branches continue to function on their own while the people have already been forgotten and are condemned to be passive consumers of media sources (Wolin, 1994, p. 14). Wolin's critical stance on periodic elections represents a repudiation of minimal democracy carried out by electoral politics.

Wolin's criticism of constitution also targets British republicans, Tocqueville, and the framers of the American constitution, whom he claims are critics of democracy. According to Wolin, the arguments of all these thinkers are formulated in opposition to democracy with the intention of repressing it. To illustrate, just as the American framers did with the House of Representatives, democracy was given a "place" (Wolin, 1994, p. 16). Otherwise, "the alleged legitimacy bestowed by the "sovereign people" would lack all credibility" (Wolin, 1994, p. 16). From Wolin's perspective, this measure is due to the revolutionary spirit that played a constitutive role in the founding of democracies and also led these thinkers to be critics of democracy. In Wolin's view, the fear of the revolutionary and radical democratic spirit that drives people to uprisings bred these thinkers' scepticism towards democracy. Consequently, they sought to tame democracy through the use of a constitution out of a concern for stability. Wolin also accuses Tocqueville of being a critic of democracy on the grounds that Tocqueville associated the success and stability of American democracy with the absence of revolutionary urge and character (Wolin, 2016, p. 79). Wolin, by contrast, is of course not as eager as Tocqueville on separating democracy from revolution. He in fact is extremely critical of this emphasis on stability and constitutional containment. As Wolin remarks: "Democracy is not about where the political is located but how it is experienced" (Wolin, 1994, p. 18). In other words, Wolin is referring to the revolution's creative vitality and its political potential to transform the demos into a collective actor. Revolutions, Wolin insists, can be a catalyst for transformation, breaking down barriers and allowing for greater inclusion and political engagement (Wolin, 1994, p. 18). Ultimately, it is through this "revolutionary transgression" that the demos becomes political, and democracy becomes a living, breathing entity that reflects the needs and desires of the people it serves (Wolin, 1994, p. 18).

In sum, again with the American Revolution in mind, Wolin claims that the constitution created at the end of the revolutionary period imprisoned democracy's potential to reveal the political, kept it in a form, and determined its limits. In other words, democracy brought by the revolution is now seen as superfluous when the revolutions are over (Wolin, 1994, p. 19). According to Wolin, here is when the permanent institutionalisation of democracy begins. Wolin explains this situation as follows:

“The political has become specialized, regularized, and administrative in character and quality. Institutionalization marks the attenuation of democracy: leaders begin to appear; hierarchies develop; experts of one kind or another cluster around the centers of decision; order, procedure, and precedent displace a more spontaneous politics: in retrospect the latter appears as disorganized, inefficient. Democracy thus seems destined to be a moment rather than a form. Throughout the history of political thought virtually all writers emphasize the unstable and temporary character of democracy. Why is it that democracy is reduced, even devitalized by form? Why is its presence occasional and fugitive?” (Wolin, 1994, p. 19)

In other words, this search for circumscription and forms resulted in the institutionalisation of the political and weakened democracy. In such a situation, democracy has no choice but to perpetuate itself occasionally and fugitively. We should ask then, what is the reason behind the institutionalisation of democracy?

Wolin furthers the discussion on institutionalisation of democracy in his article *Norm and Form* and he claims that there are various reasons behind defining democracy in constitutional and institutional terms. As I mentioned above, in *Fugitive Democracy*, Wolin draws attention to the intentions of the American framers on repressing democracy through the constitution. He expands this argument in *Norm and Form* and argues that behind constitutionalising lies an “...ideological construction designed not to realize democracy but to reconstitute it, as a consequence, repress it” (Wolin, 2016, p. 79). According to Wolin, the institutionalisation of democracy is the result of a deeply rooted belief that has been passed down from ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle to modern theorists. What then is this belief?

It is the belief that democracy is inherently prone to lawlessness (Wolin, 2016, p. 78). It is important to remind ourselves at this point that past political thinkers blamed Athenian democracy for Socrates' death. This tragic event led Plato, Socrates' student and successor, to great despair, and deeply influenced him so much so that Plato's entire political theory can be seen as a critical response to Socrates' death. Thus, Plato's argument that only intellectually well-qualified people should be allowed to rule in the *polis*, and that the rest should be ruled by this tiny minority. Aristotle, to be sure, had a strikingly different political vision, but in his classification of regimes, he showed that democracy was a deformed version of a form whose origin was "polity".

This "ancient suspicion" towards the inherent character of democracy made the ancient Greeks the first theorists of constitutionalism (Wolin, 2016, pp. 80-81). In this respect, they were the first to propose the notion of codifying both the ruling practices and the competing claims to rule, while also containing the dynamism of the political inside a predetermined framework and a carefully structured constitutional politics. (Wolin, 2016, p. 81). Therefore, by putting forward the first instances of a constitutional form, Greeks developed the first critique of democracy. In doing so, they also showed how democracy might be domesticated and how the stability of its existence might be ensured (Wolin, 2016, p. 81).

Wolin claims that this constitutional vision and memory has been handed down to modern and contemporary political theorists. Wolin gives the example of framers of the American Constitution with particular emphasis on James Madison, and contemporary theorists such as Robert Dahl. I have already provided an analysis of their perspectives in the second chapter, which does not require a repetition here. However, with his critical attitude towards the idea of constitution, Wolin not only attacks American framers, liberals, British republicans and contemporary minimal theorists but also implicitly criticises deliberative theorists who view contemporary democracy in terms of a synthesis between constitutionalism and popular sovereignty (what Habermas calls "co-originality").

In addition to all this, according to Wolin, institutionalisation has another purpose and consequence. It is the "the establishment of stability through the containment of the demos" (Wolin, 2016, p. 81). Demos is a key notion in Wolin's political theory and

has a comprehensive meaning. According to Wolin, demos does not simply mean a passive community of people endowed with rights, but also a community of citizens who can exercise collective power through participation and who are not deprived of political power due to representation created by institutionalisation (Özmağas, 2020, p. 385-386). Therefore, through the institutionalisation of democracy, the political becomes contained, and the “political potentialities of ordinary citizens” becomes damaged.

What further effects does institutionalisation have on democracy? In addition to the restriction of democratic potentiality with the constitution and forms, feelings of disenchantment and disaffiliation are among the two side effects caused by the institutionalisation of democracy. Assuming that democracy can be controlled, it inevitably leads to the disenchantment of the citizenry with the institutions that claim to represent it (Wolin, 2004, p. 601). This creates disaffiliation which “identify the state not only as post democratic but as post representative” (Wolin, 2004, p. 601). Furthermore, Wolin contends that classical and modern views of democracy that attribute democracy an established form have the consequence of “reducing democracy to a system while taming its politics by process” (Wolin, 2004, p. 601). As a result, democracy becomes a settled form administering certain governmental tasks and it loses its “moments of commonality” when the political can flourish. In other words, by institutionalisation and professionalisation, democracy loses its spontaneity and vitality (Wolin, 2016, p. 82). Additionally, Wolin identifies another significant problem we witness in contemporary constitutional democracies: once democracy is given a form, it is vulnerable to manipulation through periodic elections that are managed and controlled and is reduced to public opinion that is moulded and deluded (Wolin, 2004, p. 602).

Based on the argument that institutionalisation and the constitution destroy the essential character of democracy, Wolin introduces his understanding of democracy as follows:

“Instead of a conception of democracy as indistinguishable from its constitution, I propose accepting the familiar charges that democracy is inherently unstable, inclined toward anarchy, and identified with revolution

and using these traits as the basis for a different, aconstitutional conception of democracy. Instead of assuming that the “natural” direction, the telos, of the democratic encounter with the political is toward greater institutional organization and that the problem is to adapt democracy to the requirements of organization, we might think of democracy as resistant to the rationalizing conceptions of power and its organization which for centuries have dominated Western thinking and have developed constitutionalism and their legitimating rationale. This democracy might be summed up as the idea and practice of rational disorganization.” (Wolin, 2016, p. 83)

Once again Wolin underlines the significance of democratic ideals are by and large in tension with the organisational inclinations of ancient and modern constitutionalism and points to the necessity of reclaiming them (Wolin, 1994, p. 22). Deep down, what is at stake is democracy’s quality as a “continuous recreation of political experience” (Wolin, 2006, p. 604).

To summarise, for Wolin, there is no such thing as democracy as a form, but rather numerous forms in the shape of experiences. Among these various forms, he presents a vision of a “fugitive” democracy in which individuals experience “democratic moments” through coming together. “Its moment is not just a measure of fleeting time but an action that protests actualities and reveals possibilities” (Wolin, 2006, p. 603). Thus, Wolin invites us to rethink democracy:

“Democracy needs to be reconceived as something other than a form of government: as a mode of being which is conditioned by bitter experience, doomed to succeed only temporarily, but is a recurrent possibility as long as the memory of the political survives. The experience of which democracy is the witness is the realization that the political mode of existence is such that it can be, and is, periodically lost. Democracy, Polybius remarks, lapses “in the course of time” (VI.39). Democracy is a political moment, perhaps the political moment, when the political is remembered and recreated. Democracy is a rebellious moment that may assume revolutionary, destructive proportions, or may not.” (Wolin, 1994, p. 23)

That is to say, democracy is about “a moment of experience” in which the political lies at the heart and it is “a crystallized response to deeply felt grievances or needs on the part of those whose main preoccupation—demanding of time and energy— is to scratch out a decent existence” (Wolin, 2006, p. 603).

6.4. Assessing the Participatory Powers of Fugitive Assembly

Wolin gives the example of the Polish Solidarity Movement as an example of a democratic moment. I will give the example of Gezi Park protests as an illustration of a fugitive assembly (Gönlügür, Sezer and Başkır, 2015). What both examples had in common was that they involved people from different walks of life. However, Wolin also remarked that although heterogeneity is at stake, democratic movements cannot compete with modern forms of power without sharing certain “commonalities”. Thus, fugitive democracy is based on the “moments of commonality” of “shared concerns”. And it was precisely the discovery of the “commonality of shared concerns” that made them fugitive democratic experiences in the history of humankind. In this respect, Gezi Park protests offers us valuable insights to illustrate the fugitive concept of democracy.

Assembling physically in public spaces maintains its distinctive and participatory character alongside traditional forms of participation such as preference aggregation and voting (Frank, 2021, pp. 1–2). When people seek nothing more than an equal and just society and an honourable existence, and when there is nothing left to do except protest, large crowds gather in the streets for popular assemblies. In other words, stepping out into the streets to join a movement to demonstrate political demands is still an inalienable option for the people. The Gezi Park protests, which began in May 2013 in Istanbul, are a perfect example of a large-scale public demonstration. The reason for the demonstrations was to protest the construction of the artillery barracks planned to be built in Taksim Gezi Park and the uprooting of trees that were plundered for construction. This construction also meant destroying the few remaining green spaces in a metropolis like Istanbul. Despite the project being rejected by the High Council for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, the AKP administration decided to move through with it by disregarding the legal decisions and court orders (Arat, 2023). The AKP government’s insistence on continuing the project can be interpreted as its desire to erase the traces left by the founding elites of the secular republic and to leave its mark on country’s one of the most important squares (Gül et al., 2014, as cited in,

Arat, 2023).

The news that building activity had begun in the park at night, linking May 27 to May 28, quickly circulated on social media and many groups, especially environmental associations, started to resist by setting up tents in the park (BBC, 2023). However, as the police started to violently disperse tents and drive the protestors away, more people mobilised, and the demonstrations that were intended to defend the park evolved into broader action (Arat, 2023).

The initiation of construction works in the park by ignoring the court's decision was an indication of the government's arbitrary administration and authoritarian decisions. The underlying reason behind the Gezi Park protests was this disaffection with the government. In such a case, when *politics* has surrounded *the political* by using arbitrary means, the people have no choice but to concert their efforts to stand against top-down decisions. The reaction against the authoritarian and polarising policies of the AKP government became the *shared commonality* of the protesters, which prompted them to pour into the streets. In this respect, the Gezi Park protests represent a fugitive example of democracy erupted outside of formal spheres that provide citizens an occasion to show their will and participate in politics.

People's large-scale organisation is an example of spontaneously occurring deliberation. Deliberation in the streets stands out as a crucial participatory and transparent component of fugitive assemblies in this regard. The protests, which were held simultaneously in many parts of the country, turned into large public spaces where people came together and exchanged ideas. Protests also provided a horizontal structure with no unequal power structures and deepened the communicative process among different publics, thereby going beyond the mainstream channels of decision-making within representative institutions, as both horizontality and equality allowed the free circulation of ideas among citizens.

One of the most important and distinctive features of the Gezi Park protests was that people from very different groups came together for a common purpose. Among the groups participating in the protests, environmentalists, leftists, Kurds, LGBT groups, and feminists can be given as examples. Although each of these groups united around

different demands and worldviews, they all showed an example of acting together for a common purpose during the days of the protests. More significantly, among the participants of the Gezi protests, there were many young people and students who had no opportunity to show their dissatisfaction with the government and who were not eligible to vote. In this respect, protests allowed young people to show their reaction towards the AKP government and participate in politics. In this respect, assemblies during the Gezi Park protests were open to all and inclusive.

Arat (2023) also considers the Gezi Park protests as an example of fugitive democracy while particularly focusing on the importance of the women's movement. She argues that in addition to the many groups attended the protests women's movement left its imprint on the protests. Many secular and conservative women stood up against the brutal violence side by side and showed solidarity in the protests. This strong unity and women's resistance made the women's rights movement more visible, making it one of the main topics on the Turkish political agenda (Arat, 2023). More crucially, protests were an open and inclusive opportunity compared to formal spheres, in which women are underrepresented and are given a small number of places. In addition to the inclusive nature of the protests, they created a new type of political friendship thanks to the democratic spirit arising out of acting in concert (Çıdam, 2017).

Protests also act as transmission mechanisms. These fugitive eruptions, which occur when traditional avenues for participation and legal remedies are blocked, turn into a communication instrument that allows a variety of concerns and expectations to be narrated and expressed by different groups. This strength of togetherness boosts the transmission potential of protests. In addition, the demands are not only transferred to the decision-making bodies of the government through protests. At the same time, as Wolin remarks, memories and experiences arising from this joint action are transferred to the collective memory of civic life. In other words, although these democratic moments are episodic, the memory of the political might be preserved thanks to the transmissions.

In summary, although the Gezi protests were not enough to prevent the decisions taken by the government, the collective actions arising from this inclusive unity created an unforgettable "moment" in Turkish politics. And no matter how unsuccessful it may

seem, the permanent spirit it created will continue to circulate among people. Therefore, although democracy is a fugitive moment, it is also “a recurrent possibility as long as the memory of the political survives” (Wolin, 1994, p. 23).

6.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented an anti-institutional conception of democracy based on Sheldon Wolin’s theory. It is important to emphasise once again that, according to Wolin, democracy consists of democratic moments that emerge out of the collective power of people, beyond institutional frameworks, legal regulations and periodic elections and beyond the spheres of mainstream decision-making. In other words, democracy is about people’s democratic potential. I tried to illustrate this understanding of democracy, which appears occasionally and has a fugitive character, with an example from Turkey. Although it has effective results in terms of participatory powers, this fugitive assembly can only preserve the permanence of its democratic moments in people’s memories.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Guided by the research question of “What are the possibilities for political participation other than free and fair elections, which have become the most distinctive and defining feature of modern democracy?”, I have investigated the ways in which citizens can politically engage in public affairs beyond the processes of periodic elections. To this end, I have provided a new analytical framework under the title of “Assembly Democracy” whose theoretical basis owes a great deal to the participatory and deliberative approaches to democracy. The term “Assembly democracy” is intentionally used to emphasise the voluntary, deliberative and participatory nature of public assemblies in which ordinary people come together to concert their efforts by way of “assembling”. In this way, I have drawn attention to participatory opportunities outside the formal channels and mechanisms of representative democracy.

Furthermore, I have offered a classification and explored the possibilities and limits of assembly democracy in terms of its three varieties: institutional, associational and fugitive. In each variety, I have scrutinised the visions and contributions of three influential political thinkers: Arendt, Tocqueville, and Wolin. It is important to note here once again that my aim was not to favour one vision over another but to scrutinise them impartially.

I have presented and discussed the first variety of assembly democracy, the institutional vision, with reference to Arendt’s idea of council system, particularly her arguments advocating the institutionalisation of citizen participation. Arendt states that the participatory councils of modern revolutions are the lost treasures of the revolutionary tradition, and this tragic loss has gradually contributed to the erosion of civic engagement and of the participatory potentials of citizens. She further argues that this loss has condemned politics to the party system and representative democracy. I have argued that the idea of the council system, which Arendt offers as a solution to the problems arising from representative democracy and the party system, has a political meaning. Behind this political meaning lies Arendt’s proposal for the council system as an institutionalised space for public freedom.

Based on the institutional vision of assembly democracy, I have evaluated the participatory powers of this variety by drawing attention to a case from Barcelona. According to this assessment, I have pointed out the similarities between the origins of Barcelona en Comú and those of the revolutionary councils, their demands for democracy, and their organisational structures as formed by ordinary people coming together. Moreover, this assessment has showed that the council vision has highly inclusive and deliberative nature with a transparent participatory process. Moreover, I conclude that, this insistence on institutionalisation may, over time, create a situation in which the institutionalised participatory spaces become the property of the state itself, not the sphere of political freedom of the citizens. This can undermine the transmission capacity of institutionalised assemblies and take away citizens' agenda-setting power.

The second variety of assembly democracy has been analysed with reference to the political thought of Alexis de Tocqueville. I have argued that this variety provides an associational vision of assembly democracy. After a brief discussion of Tocqueville's understanding of democracy, I have emphasised the significance of democratic habits which seems to me to be one of Tocqueville's most original contributions to democratic theory. Accordingly, I have argued that democracy, in addition to its constitutional character, requires the willingness on the part of ordinary citizens to voluntarily come together and address public concerns. But Tocqueville offers a different interpretation of assembly democracy, as it represents not only the act of coming together but also the formation of habits supporting this act. According to this understanding, democracy is conceived as a way of life or as a political culture that cannot be reduced to institutional arrangements alone.

Tocqueville investigates this habitual lifestyle through a detailed examination of associations in America. With Tocqueville's interpretation in the background, I have assessed the participatory powers of the associational vision by looking at an association from Turkey which actively engages in environmental advocacy: "Kazdağı Doğal ve Kültürel Varlıkları Koruma Derneği". With this assessment, I have concluded that associations provide people with perfect deliberative places in which they can periodically come together and exchange their opinions about the issues that have originally led them to assemble in the first place. In addition, associations are

open to the participation of anyone who wishes to join. In this respect, they are transparent, inclusive and open public spaces where anyone can participate or scrutinise. Finally, Kazdağı Association's ability to transmit the concerns of ordinary citizens is extremely strong, as it constantly monitors public issues and environmental rights violations and brings these issues to the attention of the larger public as well as to the scrutiny of the media and the judiciary. Through this strong transmission power, it is obvious that people's agenda-setting power is enhanced.

In the last variety of assembly democracy, I have presented a fugitive vision by focusing on Wolin's perspective. Wolin, with his strong criticism of constitutional democracy and institutions, argues that constitutional regulations limit the potential of democracy and trap it in institutional processes. Under such circumstances, he argues, democracy can only exist in a fugitive form. In order to exemplify this fugitive understanding of democracy, I have illustrated a protest movement from Turkey, the Gezi Park protests, and assessed the participatory powers of this vision. Accordingly, fugitive assemblies, like the other two types of assemblies, constitutes an example of highly inclusive, open, transparent and deliberative qualities with strong participatory powers. But what weakens the participatory powers of this type of assembly is that it is its episodic nature: eruptions of civic engagement at certain moments only to suddenly disappear later on with almost no ability to sustain itself sufficient enough to cause any substantial transformation in the meantime. But what remains, as Wolin insists, is a memory of collective action and the democratic accomplishments of ordinary citizens.

Finally, with my attempt to propose a new framework to broaden our understanding of assembly democracy, I conclude that the associational vision outweighs the others as it represents a more independent as well as sustainable way to actively engage in democratic politics. I hope that I have been able to shed some new light on the study of assembly democracy within contemporary political theory.

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