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'Not All Claims Are Representative Claims': Constructing 'The People' in Post-Representative Movements

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ABSTRACT

The article argues that the eruption of 'indignation' protests after 2011 produced new discourses questioning political representation that challenge one of the most important frameworks of the constructivist turn in democratic theory: Michael Saward's representative claim. This article analyses these post-representative claims through Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's distinction between *Vertretung* (or representation as 'acting for') and *Darstellung* (aesthetic and performative representation), and concludes that it is possible to discursively construct 'the people' without implying representation as 'stepping in someone's place'.

KEYWORDS

Michael Saward;
constructivist turn;
representative claim; post-
representation; protest
movements

Introduction

The constructivist turn in democratic theory has had a major impact on how scholars understand political representation, opening new paradigms for political research. It is a movement that stopped seeing representation as a relation between two pre-given entities – the represented and the representative – and started to see it as the process that leads to the construction of these two entities (Disch, 2012; Disch et al., 2012). Going back to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's distinction between political representation as 'stepping in someone's place' (*Vertretung*) and aesthetic and performative representation (*Darstellung*), one can say that this turn showed how, when a representative acts for someone, this act discursively constructs both the representative and the represented (Spivak, 1990, p. 108). Yet, despite its merits, this approach has an important limitation: it tends to ignore how discursive constructions can take place outside representation as 'acting for' someone. This article will show this limitation through a critical analysis of the most successful expression of the constructivist turn: Michael Saward's representative claim framework (Saward, 2010).

For it tries to expand the potentials of the constructivist tradition, this article recognises Saward's contribution and its fruitful insights. However, it identifies as a by-product of his success a tendency among scholars to 'make every political claim a representative claim' (De Wilde, 2013, pp. 287–288) and apply this framework to many contexts in a search for makers, subjects, objects and audiences. Although Saward himself once stated that 'not all claims are representative claims' (Saward, 2010, p. 43), he did not reverse this generalising trend.

As I will argue, discursive constructions taking place outside the representative claims can have many expressions – for instance, in media statements about the ‘people’. To understand the limits of Saward’s framework, this article focuses on expressions of ‘non-representative’ discourses as they emerge in claims made by a series of political movements that have erupted over the last decade. These were Occupy Wall Street (USA, 2011), *Indignados* (Spain, 2011), *Jornadas de Junho* (Brazil, 2013) *Nuit Debout* and the *Gilets Jaunes* (France, 2016 and 2018–19). The demand for ‘real democracy’ acted as a nodal point in all these movements (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 62), and was precisely associated with the rejection of ‘the paradigm of representative politics, the politics of political parties, elections and voting’ (Tormey, 2012a, p. 134). I argue that the protesters’ claims do not quite fit into Saward’s theoretical system and invite one to consider a different dynamic between its elements. Moreover, they indicate how the relations between *Vertretung* and *Darstellung* are more complex than suggested by the constructivist turn.

The article is in five parts. First, I present Saward’s contribution within the constructivist turn and argue that the main aspect of this movement is the shared idea that political representation as ‘stepping in someone’s place’ always implies an aesthetic and performative representation, which becomes clear in Spivak’s distinction between *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*. Second, I highlight the current disillusionment with representative politics and present examples of political discourses that reject political representation – what I have called ‘post-representative claims’ – that emerged in the recent demonstrations. Third, focusing on empirical examples, and specially on publicly recorded claims by demonstrators in 2013 demonstrations in Brazil, I argue that there are difficulties in using Saward’s framework to analyse these claims and conclude that not all claims imply representation as *Vertretung*. In the fourth part, I develop this insight to argue that *Darstellung* may exist without *Vertretung*. The fifth and last part discusses how Saward’s representative claim is a species in a genus discourse and is distinguished from other claims according to the distance between the claim’s ‘subject’ and the centre of the discursive formation.

The Constructivist Turn and the Representative Claim

In German, there are many translations for the word ‘representation’, which provides nuances that help one to understand the constructivist turn. As Spivak argues, an important distinction is that between *Vertretung* and *Darstellung* (Spivak, 1988, pp. 275–78, 1990, p. 108; see also Disch, 2012, pp. 210–11). Spivak sees *Vertretung* as referring to political representation in a narrow sense. These include ‘stepping in someone’s place, [...] to tread in someone’s shoes’, for example, in the representative’s activities in parliament (Spivak, 1990, p. 108). In different terms, for Hanna Pitkin *Vertretung* is representation as ‘acting for’ (Pitkin, 1967, p. 59). In its turn, *Darstellung* is linked to the aesthetic and performative representation – for example, when one describes the activity of an actor, or when one says that a portrait represents a woman’s mysterious smile. It is representation as ‘standing for’, i.e. symbolic representation.¹

Although Spivak claims that ‘these two senses of representation [...] are related but irreducibly discontinuous’ (Spivak, 1988, p. 275), she grasps the core of the constructivist turn when she states that ‘in the act of representing politically, you actually represent

yourself and your constituency in the portrait sense, as well' (Spivak, 1990, p. 108). The constructivist turn has done its utmost to show that these two dimensions of the action of representing are not separable in politics and that to represent in the sense of 'stepping in someone's place' always implies representation in the aesthetic and performative sense. The constructivist turn challenged the idea that the constituency existed in an objective way and that its identity and interests could be determined before representation (Disch, 2011, p. 100). For constructivists, the constituency is to be actively constructed. When the representative speaks in the name of the 'people', for example, he is simultaneously constructing this 'people', giving it a name, an identity and transforming it into a political actor.

This new theoretical perspective has important normative consequences. Pitkin claimed that a legitimate representation would depend on the correct transmission of pre-given identities and interests of a constituency by the representative. She classified those attempts to 'create' the represented through symbolic representation as the 'fascist theory of representation' and identified it with fostering 'belief, loyalty, satisfaction with their leaders, among people' (Pitkin, 1967, p. 107). However, if constructivists saw symbolic representation as an inescapable dimension of politics, they had to question Pitkin's point of view. As a result, they put forward other criteria for political legitimacy, such as the acceptance of a discursive construction and the mobilisation of those implicated in it (Disch, 2015) or the character of the political identities that are constructed – whether they are compatible with a democratic *ethos* or not.

Saward can be included in the constructivist turn because he claims political representation depends on a discursive act. In his framework, every act of representation starts with a claim: someone who takes the floor and tries to establish a relation between two entities, implying that one of them represents the other. From this perspective, he proposes a theory of representation in which the identities of the representative and the represented are seen as the result of a performance, of a dynamic process of the production and reception of claims (Saward, 2010, p. 198).

Four elements are present in every representative claim: the maker, the subject, the object and the audience (Saward, 2010, p. 36).² As each one has its own complexity, the best way to understand them is through concrete examples.

One example is that of Brazilian presidential elections in 2010. On that occasion, former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a charismatic politician, campaigned to elect his still unknown chief of staff, Dilma Rousseff, as his successor. Lula da Silva depicted her in his efforts as the 'mother of the people' and associated her personally with the success of his government's social programmes. Therefore, using Saward's elements, one can say that, in 2010, president Lula da Silva (maker) claimed that the candidate Dilma Rousseff (subject) represented Brazilian workers and their interests (object) and that he addressed this message to voters (audience).

It is worth noticing that the subject of a claim is not necessarily an individual (it can be a party, an idea, or any other symbol), and that the object is not necessarily a group of people (it can be a single individual, a concept, and even 'nature') (Saward, 2010, p. 37). Either way, by formulating a representative claim, the maker discursively constitutes the identities of the subject and the object. From this point of view, neither the subject nor the object have an objective existence independent from the discourse: they are interpretative constructions of a directly inaccessible concrete reality that, at the same time,

shapes this reality. That is why Saward affirms that ‘there is an indispensable aesthetic moment in political representation’ for the claim-maker must ‘mould, shape, and in one sense create that which is to be represented’ (Saward, 2010, p. 74).

In a nutshell, to go back to Spivak’s categories, ‘stepping in someone’s place’ political representation (*Vertretung*) implies an aesthetic representation (*Darstellung*) of both the subject and the object. In our previous example, when Lula da Silva claimed that ‘Dilma Rousseff’ represented ‘Brazilian workers’, these two terms were not treated in a neutral and transparent way. Dilma Rousseff can be presented in many ways: as a woman, as a political activist, as someone who had been tortured, as a minister. One could add an infinity of adjectives to each of these terms. In other words, the signifier ‘Dilma Rousseff’ can have many meanings, none of which can describe the ‘true’ candidate. Versions are always partial and incomplete (Saward, 2010, p. 205). The same reasoning works even better for the object ‘Brazilian workers’. They can be described as fighters, brave, humble, suffering and loyal people. Even the composition of this group can be defined in a more precise way. The limit that separates those who are and those who are not ‘workers’ is blurred and it is up to the maker to play with this lack of definition.

For Saward, the elements that constitute political representation are not transparent. They must be ‘read’ in one way or another and constructed by attributing some interests to them. Therefore, it is clear that these interests cannot precede the political representation (Saward, 2010, pp. 77–78).

If there is no transparency in the elements of the representative claim, it can be argued that the institutional validation of a claim is itself a discursive construction. Hence, Saward’s constructivist approach permits the extension of the political representation analysis to extra-institutional representation. More important than any institutional validation, Saward believes representation exists if a claim is accepted by a constituency when it succeeds in mobilising citizens, ‘in soliciting individuals to identify with a larger group or principle’ (Disch, 2011, p. 102). Therefore, it seems that the most important aspect of the representative claim is that it creates and recreates points of individual or collective identification.

The Crisis of Representation and the Post-representative Claim

Saward’s approach is productive, but can it help one to analyse claims associated with the so-called ‘crisis of representation’, i.e. the feeling that there is a division between civil society and political elites? Several political theorists have recently discussed this disillusionment. Simon Tormey lists a series of statistical data to prove that, if as Hannah Pitkin claimed in the 1960s ‘almost everyone wants to be governed by representatives [...]; every political group or cause wants representation’ (Pitkin, 1967, p. 2), the situation is the opposite today. He says that abstention rates are rising in countries where voting is optional and that there is a significant decline in the levels of partisan identification and affiliation to the political parties. The voters also no longer trust the politicians who are often seen as being distant from the citizens they are supposed to represent (Tormey, 2015).

In tandem with this diagnosed dissatisfaction, a number of countries have recently seen the emergence of demonstrations of indignation that demanded some sort of ‘real democracy’ (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 62). I am referring to movements such as

Occupy Wall Street, the *Indignados* in Spain in 2011, the protests in June 2013 in Brazil, and the *Nuit Debout* and *Gilets Jaunes* in France in 2016 and 2018–19, among others (Thomassen & Prentoulis, 2014, pp. 213–15; Tormey, 2012a, pp. 132–34). The meaning of this ‘real democracy’ remains unclear. However, it is related in every case to a new political paradigm that Tormey called ‘post-representation’ (Tormey, 2012a), and which I associate with a new type of political discourse: what I call the post-representative claim.

In fact, the notion of post-representative claim brings together different kinds of statements classified into two categories. First, some post-representative claims are purely ‘anti-representative’, i.e. defending an immediate or direct democracy. As Tormey said, those who reject political representation understand that ‘[we] *don’t want to be represented – or more’s the same, we don’t want much to do with those who think they represent us*’ (Tormey, 2009, pp. 93–94). Lasse Thomassen and Marina Prentoulis, in their account of demonstrations in southern Europe in 2011, say that ‘one of their main issues was precisely the way in which this system did not represent the voices of ordinary people’ (Thomassen & Prentoulis, 2014, p. 220). The authors say the protestors were ‘searching for an immediate – or at least a more immediate – form of politics’, describing themselves ‘as leaderless networks or platforms without a centre’ (Thomassen & Prentoulis, 2013, pp. 169–70). Tormey has noted the central role of signifiers such as ‘Not in my name!’ in Occupy Wall Street, associating them with a post-representative project in which demonstrators ‘turn their face on parties, elections, and manifestos in favour of the immediacy of action, of doing, in the here and now’ (Tormey, 2012a, p. 133). As the *Nuit Debout* demonstrators in France stated:

Neither listened to, nor represented, persons from all horizons retake possession of the reflection on the future of our world. Politics is not a matter of professionals; it is a matter of us all (*Nuit Debout*, 2016b).

And they add: ‘[...] our mobilisation aims first of all to gather and to liberate an inaudible citizens speech in the narrow frameworks of traditional political representation’ (*Nuit Debout*, 2016a).

These ‘anti-representative’ claims are frequently accompanied by a rejection of the political class. It is summarised in expressions such as ‘They can’t represent us!’ (Sitrin & Azzellini, 2014). Tormey says these criticisms have existed since the revolts of May 1968, in France, and had also been expressed in various forms of activism and in movements such as the World Social Forum and the Zapatistas (Tormey, 2009, pp. 93–95).

However, the rejection of the political class does not necessarily imply a total rejection of representation. Unlike the ‘anti-representative’ version, the second kind of post-representative claim affirms that representation are still necessary but that the existing representatives are unable to play their roles because of a distance between the representatives and the represented, or a dysfunctional political system that can be improved. Keane sees an increasing demand for a ‘monitory representation’, for representatives to be further controlled in their roles (Keane, 2011). Teivainen pleads for non-state prefigurative representation to democratise political life (Teivainen, 2016). Thus, one also finds statements in the indignation movements demanding a new or a better representation. For example, some Occupy Wall Street protesters aimed to construct a political representation not corrupted by corporations (Gitlin, 2012). Many of the *Gilets Jaunes*

demonstrators in France defended moving on from what they saw as a trustee model of representation to a delegate concept of political representation. They believe the elements of direct democracy should be used to control their representatives, reducing their autonomy and possibly even revoking their tenure.

The two main kinds of post-representative claims – those which reject representation *tout court* and those that demand a better representation – often coexist and are hardly distinguishable. Moreover, the two kinds of post-representative claims can also be combined with classical representative claims. In this sense, even Tormey conceded that “‘We are the 99%’ is a quintessential representative claim’ (Tormey, 2009, pp. 96–98, 2012b, p. 16). It seems accurate: the indignant demonstrators (maker) claim that the indignant demonstrators (subject) stand for the 99% of the exploited population (object), addressing this claim to the world (audience).

What matters is that the post-representative paradigm is strongly linked in any of its versions to a critique of representative democracy, at least in its current form. In a nutshell, the post-representative claim refers to a discourse that criticises political representation – if nothing else, as it exists today – as antidemocratic. It is sceptical about leadership, and supports elements of direct democracy and horizontality as a way to reclaim citizens’ right to freedom of speech (Tormey, 2015). Moreover, even in its sometimes incoherent plurality, the post-representative claims are useful to the extent that they invite one to question the constructivist turn’s merging of *Vertretung* and *Darstellung* in general and Saward’s framework in particular.

Not All Claims are *Vertretende* Claims

At first sight, one could be tempted to think that the post-representative claims are only a rhetorical tool which could be analysed according to Saward’s theoretical system. This is an impression that can be reinforced wrongly by Tormey’s correct assessment that statements surrounding indignation movements such as ‘We are the 99%’ fit in well with Saward’s framework. However, as I will argue in this section, the post-representative claim breaks away from the category of representative claim.

To see how the post-representative claim disrupts Saward’s framework, I will analyse statements that are closer to the first kind of post-representative claim – the strong rejection of representation, at least as *Vertretung*. I will do so by concentrating on a piece of research in which I studied publicly recorded political claims that were made during a series of demonstrations against higher public transport fares in Brazil in June 2013. This case is inspiring because of the posture of the claim-makers. Their way of performing this first kind of post-representative claim not only did not lead them to occupy the role of subject, but also kept this position vacant. Hence, it provided an example of how the object of a claim can have an independent existence. Based on this, in the next section I show that the second kind of post-representative claim – the idea that a better representation is possible – also depends on the independent existence of the object.

The Brazilian protests were initially organised by an anarchist-influenced group called *Movimento Passe Livre* (MPL), freely translated as ‘Free Fare Movement’. The protests started initially with small demonstrations with a limited set of demands but succeeded in attracting hundreds of thousands to the streets after violent scenes of police brutality shocked the country (Ortellado, Judensnaider, Lima, & Pomar, 2013, p. 104). When the

demonstrations expanded, the original demands ended up being overtaken by events and the protest became a broad nationwide and ideologically diverse movement against those in power (Singer, 2013, pp. 33–34).

In this context, the MPL is particularly interesting as the group wanted to spark a popular uprising but stressed, at the same time, that it did not want to control or represent the citizens in the streets. In a public interview during the events, Caio Martins Ferreira, an activist from this group said:

We [the MPL] are not the owners of the movement. The leadership does not belong to us. [...] We called for [the struggle against the increase] but we are only one of the groups involved [in the struggle]. It is a big popular struggle in which the people are revolting (Martins Ferreira, 2013a, 16:13–21:50).

This position confirms what he said to a journalist on the first day of demonstrations, when protestors clashed with the police: ‘*We don’t control who is a demonstrator and who is not but [the confrontation with the police] was a popular uprising*’ (Martins Ferreira, 2013b).

Mayara Longo Vivian, who also was part of the group, reaffirmed this distrust of leadership and representation when she stated to a filmmaker:

We don’t put ourselves forward as the leadership. We have neither the intention, nor the desire, nor the political dimension to want to be a movement that could be representative of the masses or the people who are on the streets. No! We don’t want to represent anybody. The people can represent themselves very well, better than we can. We don’t see ourselves as an authority but as a reference (Vivian, 2014, 25:16–25:36).

The group claimed victory when the rise was revoked. Privately, some described the result as bittersweet: the triumph came when the movement had been partially co-opted by new players. It is not my goal here to discuss the consequences of the MPL’s self-denying leadership, but its unintended negative results may be indicated. Many authors highlight the appearance of diverse singularities within collective identities in contemporary protest movements (Mendonça, 2017). Yet, in June 2013 diversity went beyond the simple expression of singularities. The MPL’s self-denying leadership emptied the demonstrations of a well-defined orientation. It allowed for a lack of cohesion, and even open contradiction between sections of protesters (Alonso & Mische, 2017, p. 12; Pinto, 2017, pp. 134–35). Eventually, the marches were transformed by a large number of novice demonstrators with right-wing views. Upset, the MPL even preferred to stop calling new demonstrations to avoid further co-optation. Nevertheless, the group’s official statements to broader audiences continued to eulogise its self-denying leadership. As another activist, Lucas Monteiro de Oliveira, said in a public statement:

Our aim was to let the struggle against the higher fares escape from our control and it escaped. On Wednesday [19 June 2013], when the rise was cancelled, six demonstrations took place in São Paulo. None of them was called by the MPL. Some were called by our partners from the MTST [the Homeless Workers’ Movement], but others were not. It was the people who revolted.

[...] [The authorities cancelled the rise] because the people organized itself and went onto the street and took the leading role in the biggest mobilization of the last twenty years in Brazil [...]. The three biggest parties in the country retreated politically when faced with the force of the people (Monteiro de Oliveira, 2014, 04:12–04:38, 08:55–09:37).

What is the specific point of this discourse in relation to Saward's framework? One could say that, although the MPL rejects representation, it nevertheless occupied a representative function in practice, as it was the maker and subject of its claims simultaneously. However, even if one accepts the MPL's practical leadership, being a *de facto* leader – or an accepted 'reference', as Mayara said – that makes political claims is not necessarily the same as being a *de facto* representative. Saward formulates a theoretical distinction between maker and subject and the difficulties in finding the latter do not mean it is merged with the former. Ethnographic studies on Occupy Wall Street have shown that even in horizontal 'leaderless' movements prominent figures acquire more claim-making power. They are a product of the internal dynamics of the movement but they also implement identity building mechanisms (Kang, 2012). These tensions between horizontality and verticality were also present in Brazil. However, the MPL's privileged position did not mean that they were representatives 'stepping in someone's place' in any way. They were claim-making leaders but not leaders *qua* subject.

If one accepts that the MPL as claim-maker leader did not put itself into the position of leader *qua* subject, a first attempt to insert these claims into Saward's framework consists of seeing the maker move away from the subject and try to couple it with the object. I would call this hypothesis 'fusion hypothesis'. Applying this approach to the Brazilian example, one could say that the MPL (maker) claims that the demonstrators (subject) represent themselves (object), addressing this message to the citizens of the city of São Paulo (audience).

Tormey referred to this idea in a discussion paper. Nevertheless, his argument was based on another perspective. He claimed it was not the criticism of representation which coupled both but the representation which separated them in the first place. He describes representative politics as 'a politics that enshrines the uncoupling of the subject and object of the political itself, and that makes disjuncture a virtue, not merely a necessity' (Tormey, 2012b, p. 15).

The issue with this hypothesis is that, if the fusion actually takes place, it makes little sense to talk about a subject. The subject may be implicit in sentences such as 'the people can represent themselves very well', but in practice this catachrestic moment involves only a reference to the object. 'People' here is the name of the object not of an external subject 'stepping in someone's place'. When subject and object totally overlap in the discursive construction of a claim, the very conceivability of the subject is jeopardised. Hence, the fusion hypothesis must be put aside.

In this sense, what I call the 'disappearance hypothesis' may be more helpful in understanding the post-representative claim. Lucas' and Caio's statements are informative here. They do not even use the word representation but they attribute certain qualities to these people – in this case, the quality of rising in revolt. The disappearance hypothesis to interpret discourses that reject representation indicates that the post-representative claim is marked by the exclusion of the subject from the analytical scheme and by a maker who restricts itself to discursively constructing the object. Taking this approach, one could say that, during the Brazilian demonstrations in June 2013, the MPL (maker) claimed that the demonstrators or the 'people' had certain interests, demands and characteristics (object) by addressing this message to the citizens of São Paulo (audience).

If, on the one hand, the distance between the maker and the subject is not a problem for Saward, on the other hand, the disappearance of the subject appears to destabilise his system. Indeed, without a subject there can be no *Vertretung*. How can one speak of political representation in these cases?

Saward seems never to have discussed this type of claim thoroughly. He approached these questions in a short passage in which he refers to the Zapatista group. As Saward said, these militants reject the position of representative of the communities they control politically. They claim they only want to listen and to make peoples' voice heard (Tormey, 2006, p. 151). The problem is that Saward does not analyse this case in greater depth and briefly inserts it into his category of mirroring claim – even if he affirms that the Zapatistas are mirroring ‘in a quite different sense’ when compared with his main examples of mirroring claims which support their legitimacy on the descriptive resemblance between the representative and the represented (Saward, 2010, pp. 99–100). Because Saward does not discuss the tensions between maker, subject and object that could emerge in post-representative discourses, he suggests that experiences of anti-globalization movements also remain in the non-problematic class of representative claim.

Pieter de Wilde well diagnosed the issue with the concept of representative claim. He claims the breadth of the usages of Saward's categories puts different discourses under the same label. He raises the question: ‘what distinguishes a representative claim from a (non-representative) political claim?’ (De Wilde, 2013, p. 287). It seems that Saward never completely responded to objections such as de Wilde's. He dealt briefly with this problem in a working paper from 2013, during a discussion on the way in which the discourses construct the objects:

The variety manifested by representative claims and therefore by invoked object effects raises the question of where the boundary lies between statements which are representative claims and those which are not (Saward, 2013, p. 6).

Saward's answer is that everything depends on the context. He explains it by using the example of the comedian Beppe Grillo who turned Italian politics upside down in 2013. Saward says that under normal conditions the sentence ‘I am only a comedian, I am not a politician’ would be interpreted as if it meant that, since Beppe Grillo was not a politician, he could not do anything for his fellow citizens. However, in the Italian electoral context, a new meaning was attributed to this sentence: since Beppe Grillo was not a politician, he would not repeat the politicians' errors – thus constituting a representative claim (Saward, 2013, pp. 6–7).

Saward is right: the context is important. However, the problem with this answer is that it does not touch on the core of the question. This answer provides no room for ‘(non-representative) political claims’. Either one is inside the representative claim's framework or one is outside it and cannot produce politically relevant speeches. Outside the political-electoral context, Beppe Grillo's sentence does not constitute new collective identities. It is not a representative claim. It is not even a politically engaged claim. The only political dimension it can have is that of our repetitive daily lives which naturalise things as they are.

One could counter-argue that I am being unfair by raising a problem over Saward's framework because it attributes to him an intention of encompassing all political

discourses that it does not have. Saward himself affirmed that ‘there are more things in the political world than claims [...] and not all claims are representative claims [...]’ (Saward, 2010, p. 43). It seems to me, however, that his response does not contribute to explaining what these ‘(non-representative) political claims’ could be.

In short, the question is how to know if there are political discourses which can constitute political identities and to establish interests but which are not linked to a subject that would represent an object. I believe it is obvious that these discourses exist.

All Claims are *Darstellende* Claims

Before continuing, I must say a word on the ideological content of the movements producing post-representative claims. If the criticism of representation and defence of horizontalism were often associated with anarchist ideas, the indignation movements were not purely anarchist as they see the state in a pragmatic way ‘as a structure to be reclaimed’ (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 17). In fact, Paolo Gerbaudo sees two dimensions in the protests that have erupted across the world since 2011: an anarchist dimension and a populist dimension. These dimensions come from traditions that were already associated in the past – for example, in Russian *Narodnichestvo* – but that constituted antithetic orientations in the last century. Gerbaudo says their latest encounter led to the appearance of ‘citizenism’ – an ‘anarcho-populism’ which ‘is populist in content, but libertarian or neo-anarchist in form’ (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 17).

The paradoxical nature of this combination stems from the fact that, if on one hand, there is a demand to go beyond representation (*Vertretung*), on the other hand the notion of the ‘people’ (even a ‘leaderless people’) against an oligarchy, which is central to populism, highlights the fact that one cannot escape representation (*Darstellung*).

With this idea in mind, Saward’s assertion that not all claims are representative claims is qualified. Let us accept that in post-representative claims such as ‘the people is not represented’, the claim-maker is constructing this ‘people’ in a certain way. It is aesthetically representing this non-represented entity – and quite often constructing this ‘people’ in opposition to their official representatives. So, if on one hand, Saward is right when he says that not all claims are representative claims (in the sense of *Vertretung*, what one may call *vertretende* claims), on the other hand he is ontologically wrong: indeed, every claim is a representative claim (in the sense of *Darstellung*, what one could call *darstellende* claim).

For example, the MPL group was once described as the ‘anti-party’ thanks to ‘its ability to organise without representing’ (Ortellado, 2014, p. 35). Even if one accepts this intention, it is clear that the group has not stopped playing its role of making representation *in the aesthetic and performative sense of the term*. In view of the lack of objectivity of social reality, every discourse has a representative dimension in the sense of *Darstellung*, and every representation of this kind carries a value judgement in itself. As Lasse Thomassen and Marina Prentoulis said: ‘[there] is necessarily an element of representation where the representation is constitutive of what is represented’ (Thomassen & Prentoulis, 2014, p. 220). It has to do with the unavoidable symbolic dimension of social reality, with the fact that ‘language [...] is a system of representation. Words stand in for, “signify” or represent objects’ (Tormey, 2015). Therefore, one can say that the MPL makes various claims which the context makes politically important and it succeeds in constructing an object, in mobilising the citizens and in constructing collective identities but they

do not express any will to establish a relationship of political representation as ‘stepping in someone’s place’.

The constructivist turn has been successful in showing that the verb *vertreten* is always conjugated with the verb *darstellen*, emphasising the aesthetic and performative character of political representation. What the first kind of post-representative claim shows is that the opposite is not necessarily true – i.e. one should not amalgamate the aesthetic and performative representation present in every discourse with the political representation strictly speaking. It is worth noticing, for example, that this is not exclusively a characteristic of post-representative claims. The media, for example, often constructs the ‘people’ without issuing representative or post-representative claims but rather other kinds of ‘(non-representative) political claims’ (Moffitt, 2017, p. 108). Actually, following Nina Santos (2019), one understands how, during the Brazilian protests, the mainstream media tweaked the MPL’s post-representative discourse to make their own claims about the ‘people’.

The idea that the ‘people’ can be constructed beyond representative claims as ‘acting for’ is ignored almost everywhere by constructivists. Nevertheless, they touch on these issues occasionally. As Saward said, the very description of a subject as a delegate or a trustee, or even as an agent in relation to a principal, is discursively constructed itself (Saward, 2010, pp. 72–73). This may encourage one to consider a scenario in which this kind of construction does not take place at all or is rejected.

In an inspiring passage, Saward establishes a logical distinction between two moments of the representative claim. Firstly, the maker attributes values – the aesthetic dimension – while constructing the subject and the object. Only afterwards would he claim the link between the values attributed to the subject and object so that a representative relationship can be justified (Disch, 2015, p. 487). As Saward says:

If I allege that you, a potential constituent of mine, possess key characteristic X, and if I can get you to accept this characterization, I can *then* present myself as a subject possessing capacity or attribute Y that enables me to represent you by virtue of a certain resonance between X and Y (Saward, 2010, p. 47, emphasis added).

These are the two stages. Firstly there is the aesthetic and performative representation of the representative and the represented *then* the establishment of the link between these two discursive entities – a step that is also performative, but secondary. The post-representative claim invites one to consider that these two stages are not mutually necessary. More precisely, the first stage can take place without implying the second.

Saward gets closer to this type of reflection, but he does not take an in-depth look. Discussing the fact that the representative claims can silence the represented by reinforcing their absence from the political sphere, Saward says:

Representative claims can activate and empower recipients or observers, even if that is not the intention of the makers. Recipients or audiences are ‘on the map’ by being invoked in representative claims, even if an initial effect of a claim is a silencing one. One needs an identity as a *prior condition* of being silenced by a claim to represent one. Once established, [...] that very identity can be a resource for dissent. This can empower those on the receiving end of claims, for example, to ‘read back’ the nature of the claim (Saward, 2010, p. 55).

One finds the idea that both stages are independent here. Saward does not go any further. In his report, he uses a comparison between the political representation and the

representation of charts and paintings, in which the distinction between the two stages is less clear. However, one can imagine citizens adopting an identity even if they reject those who claim to represent them politically. In this passage, Saward deals with the rejection of a claim in a particular way. The claim is rejected not because one does not accept or identify with it, but because one *only partially* accepts or identifies with it – ‘those on the receiving end of claims’ can accept the object or identify with it, but see the subject as inadequate.

The idea of an inadequate subject leads me to an underlying topic: does the second kind of post-representative claim – the idea that there could be a better representation – impact the argument presented here? In each case of post-representative claims one is dealing with different approaches to the inadequacy of the subject. The first kind wants to get rid of the idea of a subject as such – for the people would not need representation – while the second believes that a more adequate subject can be found. A careful analysis, however, shows that the second kind of post-representative claim does not jeopardise the bedrock of the main argument. Both the rejection of representation *tout court* and the one-off rejection of *this particular representative* – in the idea that *this person* does not represent us, but perhaps somebody else could do it, in a different institutional arrangement – imply that a discourse can construct an object independently from the construction of a subject. In every case, there can be *Darstellung* without *Vertretung*.

All Claims are Discursive Constructions

Considering the limitations of the representative claim framework to incorporate ‘(non-representative) political claims’, in this section I argue for a more general analytical frame. In this perspective, all kinds of claim are species of a genus discourse, varying according to the distance between the subject and the centre of the discursive formation. To explain this idea, I will discuss three possible relations between object and subject – and how *Darstellung* relates to *Vertretung* in each case. These different relations are found in post-representative claims, in what I briefly introduce as ‘embodying’ claims, and in typical representative claims.

In the post-representative claim the object’s discursive construction does not depend on the discursive construction of a subject. The relation between subject and object is non-existent or blurred at the most. One is claiming that the object has certain characteristics, aesthetically constructing it, but not establishing a relation with an external discursive entity. The ‘people’ exist without a sovereign, and somehow in opposition to it. For example, in the streets, the ‘people’ emerges as a discursive construction, and there is no leader *qua* subject linked to it.

Although what I now call the ‘embodying’ claim appears to be the exact opposite of the post-representative claim, paradoxically it also lacks a subject as such. I am referring to a Hobbesian situation in which the leader *qua* subject embodies the ‘people’. In more concrete terms, one could consider classic populist experiences in Latin America in which ‘the identity of both the populist leader and the people are constituted in a unique relationship’ (Zac & Sayyid, 1998, pp. 250–51). Examples of this are Vargas in Brazil and Perón in Argentina. Curiously enough, the ‘fusion hypothesis’ that I had rejected earlier reappears here in an inverted way. In this moment of catachresis, there is no ‘people’ without the figure of the sovereign. Subject and object are one and the same.

Not only does the subject discursively constitute the object and put himself in relation to it but the subject embodies the object. He is the gathering element that allows for the existence of the object that names it. In this situation, without any formal representative there would be no represented. Saward's two-stage process discussed above – the construction of the representative and of the represented and their subsequent *mise en relation* – would actually be one single monolithic process. In fact, as suggested when I rejected the fusion hypothesis, one gets to a point in which it would probably be incorrect to distinguish between subject and object in this case. This is because it would treat the object as a referent – something that Saward himself rejected – ignoring the fact that, in this situation, leader *qua* subject and 'people' are co-constitutive. They are both part of the object. There is no subject representing an object, but an object whose name is the name of the leader (Laclau, 2005, p. 100). Of course, the democratic status of this kind of embodiment is not uncontroversial (Urbinati, 2019, p. 33).

These two scenarios are far from the third discursive formation one should consider: Saward's typical representative claim. A representative claim implies the construction of an independent but related – or relatable – subject. Neither the leaderless assembled 'people' nor the Hobbesian sovereign who incarnates the 'people' fit his framework.

Centrality is the most important idea to take into account here. It was used in studies distinguishing between nationalistic discourses – in which the 'nation' is the master signifier at the centre of a discursive formation – and populism – in which the 'people' occupies this position (Stavrakakis, Katsambekis, Nikisianis, Kioupkiolis, & Siomos, 2017). I now want to apply this category to determine the position of the subject – for example, the leader – in relation to the centre of the discursive articulation that creates an object, such as the 'people'. In a typical 'post-representative' claim, the 'people' would crystallise around a symbol that has no positive relation with a leader *qua* subject. If the entities that often play the role of 'subject' (politicians, representatives) have a place in the discursive formation, it is probably as an antagonistic other – that which the 'people' is organised against. However, there is no subject at the centre of the discursive formation but just an object. That said, the subject also disappears in the Hobbesian scenario. Because of the centrality of the sovereign's figure in the discursive articulation, the subject turns out to be unconceivable as such, simply becoming the very name of the object.

In Saward's typical representative claim one is dealing with an intermediary case. The subject – the leader, the representative, etc. – will be part of the discursive formation, close to its centre. Nevertheless, another discursive entity – an independent object – would occupy the latter.

Returning to the Brazilian electoral example mentioned at the beginning of this article, when one says that Dilma Rousseff represents Brazilian workers, the term 'Brazilian workers' is itself symbolising the object. It synthesises and represents an entity without being imperatively associated with the figure of a 'sovereign' subject. In this case, with the figure of Dilma Rousseff who was not widely known to the public at that time. Additionally, one could say that the image of the claim-maker, Lula da Silva, was much more central than his successor's in the creation of this popular identity, even if in this situation he was not presenting himself as a subject.

To sum up one can say that post-representative claims, 'embodying' claims and typical representative claims are species of the genus discourse. From the post-representative

claim in particular, one learns that the subject is not a necessary moment of a discursive formation. The claim-maker discursively constructs an object that is independent from any subject – to the point that there is no subject in the discursive articulation. In a representative claim, however, the subject will be constructed and increasingly apparent the more it occupies a central position in the discursive formation. In the extreme case, when it becomes a nodal point, one approaches a Hobbesian situation in which the identity of the ‘people’ depends on the figure of the sovereign.

Conclusion

Returning to a distinction put forward by Spivak, the aim of this article was to go further into the idea of ‘construction’ and conjugate *darstellen* without conjugating *vertreten*. This exercise solves the difficulty in establishing the limits of the representative claim – a difficulty that originates from the confusion caused by the different meanings of ‘representation’. It shows that even a post-representative claim ‘represents’ in the sense that it aesthetically and performatively constructs collective identities but that it is not a representative claim in the sense that articulates a subject and an object.

I cannot stress enough the Saward’s approach is the main contribution to the discussion about political representation in recent times. It is useful to the extent that he shows how the discourse constructs collective identities in frequent cases. What was missing was an articulation between an already broad theory on political representation as ‘acting for’ and an even more general theory on discursive formations. In this sense, I suggest that the representative claim’s framework should be seen as a set of analytical tools that work to understand situations that involve political representation as ‘acting for’ (*Vertretung*) – in the sense that a subject and an object are both present in the discursive formation. In other words, the representative claim is a specific case in a constructivist discourse theory – a theory that is compatible with the idea that not all claims are *vertretende* claims but that all claims are *darstellende* claims.

Notes

1. Hanna Pitkin associates *Darstellung* both with descriptive and symbolic representation (Pitkin, 1967, p. 59). I argue that one is dealing in all cases with symbolic representation, as every description implies a symbolic choice.
2. In the first version of his framework, Saward presents a fifth element: the referent. However, he removed it in a recent working paper (Disch et al., 2012, pp. 111–114; Saward, 2013, p. 1).

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