



# **CONCEPTUALISING GLOBAL DEMOCRACY**

**A PROJECT OF THE  
BUILDING GLOBAL DEMOCRACY PROGRAMME**

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## Introduction

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Discussing the meanings of global democracy should itself be a globally democratic process. Such a debate would include contributions from different world regions, different cultures, different walks of life, different ages, classes, genders and races. Many diverse people have something to say on the subject.

Yet actual literature on global democracy has so far tended to have a much narrower base. Predominantly the ideas have come from the North Atlantic area, from Judeo-Christian western modernity, from middle-class academe, and from older white men. This is not to say that existing ideas about global democracy are uninteresting or unimportant. They often are. But the debate has so far drawn from quite restricted circles of global humanity.

To broaden discussions of the nature and purpose of global democracy, the Building Global Democracy programme has developed a Conceptualising Global Democracy project. This initiative has involved contributors from ten world regions in equal measure. It has brought together views from Amazonian, Confucian, Hindu, Islamic, Melanesian and Western traditions. The discussion has included a wide range of activists, officials and politicians as well as academics. The participation has also been gender balanced and has spanned ages from 20s to 80s.

What do ideas of global democracy look like when they reflect this diversity of the global condition? The Conceptualising Global Democracy project has asked writers from ten world regions to set out their ideas of what democracy could mean when applied to global affairs. Here you can read short summaries of their views and get a taste of the rich insights that are available from a more fully global perspective on global democracy.

## Globalizing 'Rule by the People': A Deliberative View

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This chapter advances three main points. First, it is vital in contemporary politics to think through the concept of global democracy. Second, any conception of democracy that wishes to hold on to an ideal of self-determination – including global democracy – must meet two basic conditions: those of political *equality* and political *bindingness*. Third, deliberative democracy offers opportunities for meeting these two criteria in global politics today.

### *Needed: Global Democracy*

One characteristic of our era of globalization is the growth of political problems that transgress territorial boundaries and, as a result, cannot be addressed by nation-states alone. At the same time, academics and practitioners today agree that the suprastate organizations which are supposed to help handle these problems suffer from democratic deficits. Since these global institutions significantly affect peoples' lives and life chances, the ideal of democracy holds that people should have a say in decision-making by these bodies. Thus for democracy to be meaningful today, it needs to include global democracy.

The prospects for more democratic global governance have stimulated much vivid debate. However, both academics and practitioners have tended to rush into devising institutional arrangements without first thoroughly investigating the underlying principles of what is being institutionalized. Much conceptual unclarity still reigns concerning what 'rule by the people' actually means in a global context. Before proceeding to proposals for institutional design, or even proposals for a certain conception of global democracy, it is important to identify the necessary conditions for democracy.

### *Needed for (Global) Democracy: Equality and Bindingness*

There is not one way to do democracy, and specific practices of democracy have been highly diverse across the world and over time. That said, all regimes which qualify as 'democratic' in the sense of being true to the ideal of self-determination must meet certain criteria. Without such common points it would not be possible to apply the term 'democracy' to the various situations. So what are those basic conditions for democracy?

Defining indispensable conditions for democracy is not just an academic philosophical exercise. If clear criteria are not specified, then the word 'democracy' may be misused in all kinds of contexts to justify oppression, exclusion and injustice. The looser the term becomes, the easier it can be hijacked for such harmful purposes. It is argued here that, if democracy means rule by the people - i.e. collective self-determination - then it entails two necessary conditions, namely, political equality and political bindingness.

On the first point, of equality, democracy is distinguished from other forms of government (such as dictatorship, monarchy, or aristocracy) by its egalitarian character. In a democracy all subjects are equal in the sense that they have the same political power. Thus, democracy is a system of decision-making in which anyone who is affected by or subjected to a decision or law has an equal possibility of participating (directly or indirectly) in the making of this decision.

On the second point, of bindingness, democracy is a political system which requires that those who are affected by or subject to a law or a political decision are in some way also its authors. In other words, in democracy the people through certain actions *bind themselves* to a governing authority. It is not enough that people merely *feel* that their interests are somehow being represented by the political authority in question. Some concrete political *action* is also required, for example, through voting in a plebiscite.

*A Way to Equality and Bindingness: Global Deliberative Democracy*

Using this conceptual framework as a springboard, the chapter explores the limits and possibilities of democracy in global politics by drawing on the *deliberative conception* of the

social theorist Jürgen Habermas. It is argued that deliberative democracy offers fruitful tools for theorizing political equality and political bindingness due to its emphasis on the interdependence and complementarity of two ‘tracks’ of the normative relationship between governing authorities and their subjects. In contrast to liberal representative democracy, deliberative democracy presumes that this relationship cannot consist of a ‘formal track’ alone, namely, of elected lawmakers. Equally important is an ‘informal track’, consisting of civil society engagement and public debate, such as witnessed for example in the World Social Forum.

Deliberative theory is often criticized for being dependent on a theory of modernity, and thus on a particular Western context. Thus how far is a deliberative framework relevant in conceptualizing global democracy? It is argued here that a deliberative approach has advantages as well as limits when applied globally.

### **Global Democracy as Talanoa: A Pacific Perspective**

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*Talanoa* is a cross-cultural process of storytelling derived from Pacific islands traditions. It emphasises the need to tell stories without concealment of what is, and what is not, important. *Talanoa* is a way to speak, hear, learn and build inter-subjective understandings. As such, it offers a method of working through conflict in different situations. Indeed, *talanoa* has figured centrally in our own engagement with political instabilities in Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Tonga.

Drawing on these experiences, we reflect on the implications of *talanoa* for ways of understanding global democracy. First we explore how the concept and method of *talanoa* constructs outside/inside boundaries of social identity to realise a distinction between people who are affected by rule-makers and ‘the people’ for whom rule-makers are specifically responsible. The emphasis is on the commitments and needs of affected people who see themselves outside the boundaries within which rule-makers and ‘the people’ develop and

implement policies on the basis of certain rules. We then consider the inter-subjective understandings of rule and accountability that have emerged from our work with this storytelling process. Then we assess how *talanoa* can measure accountability and contribute to building peaceful and stable relations within the moral space of global issues.

Regarding the concept and method, *talanoa* combines two Austronesian terms. *Tala* signifies the point, or message, of a story. *Noa* signifies the responsibility and capability of participants in storytelling to detach their perceptions, thoughts and feelings from prior commitments. A situation of *noa* enables listening to, and learning from, the *tala* without the burden of a predetermined agenda. Only after that listening and learning do the parties reattach to their respective commitments and inter-subjectively come more deeply to understand one another's values. The process of *talanoa* thereby provides a way for people to communicate their experience of policy effects to rule-makers in a global context.

People participate in *talanoa* by authoring their own stories. These stories disclose their evaluation of the power that affects their lives. In our experience of *talanoa*, people disclose the effects of power (i.e. the exercise of the right to make and implement rules) largely based on their and other's experience of pleasure or pain. For all its intangibility, their experience of pleasure or pain tells us more about their view of power than any material product produced by that power. People talk of the names, institutions and places responsible for rules, the nature of those rules, and the effects that extend beyond the boundaries that rule-makers take into account. Rules that accommodate the commitments of a people are evaluated positively, while rules that suppress those commitments are evaluated negatively. Peace, or conflict, generally relate to support for, or opposition to, rules and places of power. It is therefore important in creating conditions for global stability (or ending instability) that there is a way, embodied by *talanoa*, to speak, hear, learn and build inter-subjective understandings about the global effects of rules.

*Talanoa* has been particularly invoked around experiences with the global effects of policy in the Pacific. People have with their storytelling evaluated the rule-makers they hold accountable for past, present, and future (possible) effects on their island societies. They have talked of how

policy implemented on behalf of ‘the people’ affects people beyond rule-makers’ specific bounds of responsibility. These *talanoa* processes have in turn generated inter-subjective understandings about whether to maintain or change the rules, including the construction of new kinds of democracy.

Although *talanoa* is a practice of the Pacific, it arguably offers inspirations for building new understandings and positive practices of global democracy. In a global context, the situation of *noa* would enable storytellers of different cultures to listen and learn what their respective *tala* reveal. They could then use this inter-subjective understanding to arrive at positive or negative evaluations of existing conduct and arrangements of global power based on the pleasure or pain that they generate. On this basis, accountability could be cross-culturally evaluated and measured with some degree of clarity, and rule-makers could know whether to maintain or change the rules that affect people globally.

### **Global Democracy through National Democracy**

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Speaking of globalised democratic politics makes very little sense when democracy is disappearing at the national level. No global democratic political process can develop unless it is based on serious democratic change at the national and local levels.

The problem is not global democracy, but the lack of adequate ways to achieve change within the framework of existing national democracy. Popular unrest and mass riots are becoming a frequent occurrence even in many democratic European countries, showing that existing institutions do not allow for expression of discontent and resolution of issues. Moreover, although these issues are related to global developments, people express them as concerns of their specific nation. Only when new contenders for power emerge at the national level will there will be a reason to discuss a prospect for global democracy.

Democracy at the national level is quite weak today, even if many liberals describe the late twentieth century as the time when democratic principles triumphed. By 2000 one can hardly find any government around the world that is not praising democracy in its abstract form. It was considered self-evident that, with the establishment of multi-party electoral systems and the achievement of press freedom, people of different countries around the world would be empowered to control their fate.

However, in practice exactly the opposite has happened. Governments have accepted formal democratic procedures, but these institutions have increasingly lost any substance and now in no way challenge the overriding power of corrupt and irresponsible elites controlling societies. Even in Western Europe elite rule has turned increasingly arrogant and irresponsible, denying the public any influence on the decision-making process.

This decay of democratic institutions was extremely well expressed when the electorate in most countries of the European Union (EU) was denied any chance to vote on the draft of the European constitution. When national referendums in France and the Netherlands rejected the project, the constitution was put back on the agenda in the form of the Lisbon Treaty that was not subject to popular vote in those countries. And when this new version of the document too was rejected in a popular vote by the Irish electorate, this country was forced to replay the referendum in order to obtain 'the right result' the second time around.

These problems with referendums and other political procedures are nothing but the result of a much deeper erosion of democracy around the world. This erosion is taking place across the East and the West, across the North and the South. The right to choose a political party which will hold public office remains, but the right to decide on policy has been lost to unaccountable bureaucracies. Control has shifted to regional and global institutions which are presented as being a fair representation of national democracies at the international level. However, in practice they are unaccountable bodies that work closely, and in increasingly authoritarian fashion, with the national bureaucracies of their member states. One sees this in the EU, the WTO, the G20 and elsewhere.

Many critical intellectuals have described this situation in detail, but then tend to offer only utopian or partial solutions as an alternative. Some have advocated participatory democracy, which became the latest fashion among intellectuals. Unfortunately, this answer is no more valid than the proposition of global civil society. Concentrating attention on local self-government, these initiatives have no chance to withstand and overcome the pressure of global forces which now erode democracy.

Nor will an anti-political approach work. That would simply leave the realm of politics to those who are interested in protecting the current status quo. What is needed are collective political actors who are capable not just of protesting and saying no, but also of working out and putting into practice real reforms.

These struggles for democracy in regard to global problems need to focus on national politics and the state. The current global crisis is good news in this respect, because it weakens the present system and creates opportunities for change. This crisis also reveals the limits of power of global corporate and institutional actors, while again showing the central role of the nation-state as a main source of financial resources that are needed to put the global economy back on track. It also shows how much the state itself needs to be changed. But this change will not happen spontaneously; nor is there any guarantee that new contenders for power at the national level will be progressive or democratic. Movements must remain alert to these dangers.

### **The Decolonisation of Global Democracy**

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Veritable global democracy is not possible when, as at present, one societal order is prescribed for and imposed upon the whole of the planet's population. This single order, the world system

of modernity, has been historically characterised by a Euro-centric patriarchal monocultural pattern of knowledge, the imperialism of a specific type of reason, and the primacy of particular subjects: white, European, male, educated, privileged and heterosexual. In imposing itself, particularly on the South, global modernity has resorted to violences, including colonialism, genocide and slavery. The luminous nature of modernity for the North has thus historically gone hand in hand with the dark underside of modernity for the South. A radical decolonisation of modern knowledge systems is a necessary condition for both global democracy and human survival.

When the so-called free markets, the pretended universality of liberalism's political grammar, and the standards of knowledge of modern science are imposed upon other peoples, processes of extraordinary physical and epistemological violence take place, denying others their character as subjects with other cultural traditions, other conceptions of individual and community, other conceptions and practices of authority, other modalities of knowledge, and other ways of being with(in) the rest of the web of life. Others are thus deprived of the right to any historical or cultural alternative beyond the bounds of euro-centred modernity. It is not possible to speak of democracy when only a single model of knowledge is recognised as valid.

Yet, in spite of more than 500 years of the global imperialism of modernity, we still live in a richly pluricultural world. Tensions and conflicts continue between, on the one hand, an authoritarian monocultural world order that seeks to naturalise market society and liberal democracy as the only possible historical option and, on the other hand, the great plurality of peoples and communities all over the world that are struggling for control over their own lives.

The most urgent global challenge that humanity faces today is represented by the limits of planet Earth and the predatory processes of modernity that are systematically destroying the conditions that make life possible on this planet. The forms in which thinking and debating about this profound crisis have taken place constitute an extraordinary example of the authoritarian, non-democratic character of the current global institutional structure.

Yet there is also worldwide resistance against so-called free trade; against agribusiness and the

model of accumulation by dispossession that has characterised neoliberal globalisation; for the defence of threatened peoples, cultures and territories; against patriarchy; and for climate justice. Together these movements constitute some of the most dynamic expressions of struggles for another possible world, bringing together local, national, regional and global struggles for a new plural democratic society.

Current political processes in Bolivia and Ecuador constitute significant contemporary expressions of these confrontations. In these decolonising struggles the aim is not to include the majority in the liberal state as modern citizens, but to transform these monocultural states into pluricultural and multinational states. This implies the recognition and coexistence of a multiplicity of languages, diverse forms of property, several juridical regimes, various modalities of production, plural frames of knowledge, and multiple ways of relating to the rest of the web of life. Democracy in this context does not entail *equal access to one particular cultural tradition*, but *equality amongst a plurality of traditions*.

In what could provide an inspiration for building global democracy, the construction of new democracy in these two countries has dealt simultaneously with these diverse histories and traditions. In Bolivia the new Constitution defines three modes of democracy that are conceived as feeding upon each other in the process of deepening democracy: *representative democracy* (according to the canons of western liberal democracy); *participatory democracy* (incorporating the demands for radical democracy and the experiences of council democracy); and *communal democracy* (according to the traditions of self-government of the indigenous peoples). The new constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador have as their basic organising principle the respective Aymaran and Quechuan notions of *suma qamaña* (a good life) and *sumak kawsay* (living well). These notions imply not only solidarity amongst humans, but also and equally to live in harmony with and in nature. This conception represents a radical questioning of the hegemonic anthropocentrism that is characteristic of western society, going so far as to define nature as a subject of rights.

## **Gender Politics and Global Democracy: Insights from the Caribbean**

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Modern democracy centred on the nation-state has been invariably patriarchal. Men are viewed as the natural leaders of countries and dominate the national political arena. Women are generally relegated to the private sphere of the home and to roles of supporting men in the process of political decision-making.

Thus the question arises how global democracy could and should be grasped as an opportunity to overcome patriarchy and work towards gender equity. Certainly there have been some promising developments to bring women's voices, participation and control into global politics. Examples include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing process through the United Nations. Such global initiatives have also furthered struggles for gender democracy in national spheres, including in Caribbean countries more particularly.

However, full incorporation of gender equity into global democracy has not yet been achieved. Instead, prevailing methods of global governance have remained patriarchal, insufficiently incorporating women into decision-making and treating gender as a marginal aspect of achieving democracy. True, global imperatives have required that Caribbean states ratify global conventions and draft national policies for gender equity. However, governments have shown little commitment to accept and implement the drafted national policies, let alone to press for gender equity as a central feature of global politics.

What could be done to correct this situation and bring gender concerns to the heart of ideas and practices of global democracy? Perhaps recent experiences with national gender policies in the Caribbean could offer important suggestions. In particular, this analysis assesses the possible implications for global democracy that might be drawn from experiences with national

gender policies in the Cayman Islands, Dominica, and Trinidad and Tobago between 1999 and 2006. These gender policies have been valuable in stimulating change and initiating a democratic process of engaging women's and men's voices at national and local levels, although they have also struggled with limitations.

The three Caribbean experiences suggest a range of approaches and propositions that could help put gender equity at the heart of strivings for global democracy. Primary among these is the need to ensure that there is a more integrated link between national and global regulatory institutions, despite the cultural differences and sensitivities that will necessarily create different policy options and possibilities for each country. In addition, it is important to ensure that issues of gender equity lie at the heart of global civil society and associated practices of global deliberative democracy, for example, through the World Social Forum. It is also advisable to approach with caution proposals to construct global representative democracy based on elected global parliaments, given that such processes on a national scale have invariably yielded patriarchal outcomes, with only lip-service paid to gender by increasing the number of women in leadership positions as a concession to global conventions. Moreover, the experience of gender policies in the three Caribbean states emphasizes that gender equity needs to be treated as an integral concern across all areas of global politics and not only as a separate realm of 'women's issues' that can easily be sidelined. There is a crucial need for gender to be treated as central to global aspects of the human condition as it is to national, local and household settings.

**Beyond Western Paradigms of International Relations  
Towards an Islamic Perspective on Global Democracy**

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What is global democracy as seen from the Muslim world? In recent times a so-called postcolonial critique has developed to challenge the long-standing dominance of Western

thought in knowledge about world politics. It is important to contest modernist assumptions that global democracy can be understood in wholly objective and secular terms. On the contrary, religion and culture more generally open up key insights for concepts and practices of democracy in global affairs.

For a long time the study of International Relations (IR) ignored questions of values, religion and culture. Meanwhile the field of Political Theory tended to look at questions of democracy only within the state. Contemporary globalization has helpfully disrupted this situation. IR has become more open to normative concerns, and Political Theory has become more open to global concerns. It is therefore now more possible to study the issue of global democracy and to bring cultural, religious and civilisational approaches to bear on it.

This return of value dimensions is especially welcome for Islamic scholars of world politics. Marginalised in 'scientific' studies of IR, Muslim voices can join normative and philosophical debates with confidence. Instead of only reacting to theories and policies set by the West, Muslim thinkers can now actively participate in setting the agenda and defining the concepts.

Reconceptualisation of global democracy beyond Western notions is needed. If global democracy is to be truly global, then theoretical mapping of the idea cannot be limited to Western literature and Western experiences. Otherwise there is a unilateral hegemony, which is itself highly undemocratic. Conceptualisation of global democracy must therefore include non-Western others, including Muslim thought.

Islam offers an alternative frame of reference that sees global democracy from a different angle. It should be stressed that Islam and democracy are not in contradiction. On the contrary, Islam has a rich tradition of thinking about democracy, although it encompasses various schools of thought. Hence there is no more a single Islamic idea of democracy than there is a single Western approach. In addition, Islamic scholarship has long engaged with international dimensions and contexts of democracy. Thus the problem is not that Islam has no ideas to contribute to debates about global democracy, but that these notions have so far not spread beyond the narrow confines of Islamic studies to wider social enquiry.

An Islamic paradigm of global democracy could highlight six main points. First, the religion of Islam provides an account of the human condition that can underpin a commitment to global democracy. Islam posits that people everywhere on earth share common possibilities and challenges of being human, a shared experience that provides foundations for a global demos

Second, the Islamic notion of *al-'Umma* (the community of faith) offers a nonterritorial alternative to the nation-state as a basis for collective identity and solidarity in global politics. The concept of the *Umma* underlines the principle that 'the people' in a democracy do not have to be bound to a particular country. Members of a demos can – as in the case of the Muslim community – be spread across the whole of the planet.

Indeed, third, Islam emphasises the notion of a global community of humanity, regardless of faith. The idea of the *Umma* could, on a certain reading of the *Qur'an* (the Islamic Holy Book) and the *Sunnah* (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) be stretched to encompass a unity of humankind.

Fourth, Islam contributes to conceptions of global democracy with its recognition of and respect for diversity in this global community. Islam regards diversity in humanity as a result of divine wisdom. Global democracy is tasked with providing a governance frame for the peaceful coexistence of difference.

Fifth, Islam highlights the interconnection of global democracy and global justice. Islamic ethics hold that only those who are capable of bringing about positive change towards social justice are entitled to power in global affairs. Peaceful coexistence of difference is not sustainable in a situation of intolerable global inequalities.

Sixth, where undemocratic global power works against global justice, Islam prescribes resistance by *Jihad* ('struggle'). This struggle can take a wide range of forms, both peaceful and violent. A major debate among Muslims in contemporary struggles for global democracy is how best to

wage *jihad* when powerful anti-democratic forces are so ready to employ violent coercion backed by talk of a 'clash of civilisations'.

In sum, then, Islam can contribute to conceptions of global democracy with its concentration on the human condition, its ideas of nonterritorial community, its strivings for intercultural harmony, its insistence on social justice, and its recognition of the need for struggle to achieve a just global democracy. These ideas can combine with other visions from the global south to offer wider and richer conceptions of global democracy than those provided by western political thought alone.

### **Gender Empowerment and Global Democracy Experiences from Kenya**

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Global influences connected with democracy and gender have impacted on women's rights in Kenya. Although global forces have sometimes promoted gender equality in Kenya, the consequences for women have not always been positive. Global and national strivings for gender empowerment are not always compatible and indeed can clash in a developing democracy such as Kenya. So dilemmas can arise when trying to link global democracy and national democracy in ways that advance the position of women.

Many developments in the global arena since the 1970s have sought to promote gender equality, which is an essential ingredient of any meaningful democracy. The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted through the United Nations in 1979. The UN also sponsored World Conferences on Women in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). The Beijing Platform of Action has been reviewed at the UN in 2000, 2005 and 2010 and remains a key reference point for gender politics. In addition, gender equality has figured in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Global arenas have also promoted important thinking around concepts of Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD).

Although the Government of Kenya has steadfastly participated in these global activities around gender empowerment, this involvement did not translate into many gains for women on the national front before 1990. In early years the spokespersons for women's rights in Kenya were largely wives of government ministers and other eminent personalities. The patriarchal leadership did not see these activities as threatening. The Mexico Conference prompted the establishment of a Women's Bureau in the Kenya Government in 1975, but this office faced challenges of underfunding and understaffing that prevented it from fully meeting its mandate. Furthermore, the bureau was an 'add-on' process that did not mainstream gender across government. Nevertheless, the Women's Bureau did oversee the global Nairobi Conference of 1985.

In the late 1980s women organisations in Kenya began to link women's rights with wider human rights and the larger movement for a democratisation of the country. In 1991 the controversial section of the national constitution that prescribed a one-party state was repealed in favour of a multiparty system. However, the state resisted the global push for democracy at the national level, and this opposition reverberated negatively on women's organisations in Kenya. Advocates of gender equality were painted as enemies of the state, and the general expansion of democratic space produced few specific gains on women's issues. Similarly, the global Beijing Platform of Action did not bring immediate gains on the gender front in Kenya due to the continuing antagonism between the state and the democracy movement in the country.

In the new century gender empowerment has begun to be felt in Kenya since the introduction of multiparty politics. For example, the proportion of women holding parliamentary seats doubled from 4.1% in 1998 to 8.1% in 2002. The share of women in ministerial positions has risen from 5.8% in 2006 to 16.7% in 2008. Other increases have occurred among senior civil servants, ambassadors and local counsellors. During this time important legislation with positive effects on women has been passed. The Women's Bureau has become a fully-fledged government department, and parliament in 2003 created a National Commission on Gender and

Development, though underfunding has remained a challenge. In 2005 the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) for Kenya was, at 0.54, higher than in the first three National Human Development Reports.

However, gains have dwindled since 2008, when post-election instability again put gender empowerment and women's rights on the back seat in Kenya. Global forces have done little to counter this negative trend. Although increases in democratic space – promoted in part by global forces – have had positive effects on the position of women in Kenya, the country continues to have low gender empowerment even when compared to the neighbouring countries and within the East African Community.

### **A Plea for Global Democracy**

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Despite some turmoil in regional, national and local arenas, people today are steadily developing a more global mindset. Hence, it is appropriate to consider the question of democracy in the present age of globalization. What does global democracy entail? In answering this question it is important to take positive and negative lessons from the past history of democracy.

Democracy has a long and rich heritage. There are the experiences of ancient Greece and Rome as well as ancient Indian experiments with grassroots democracy of the Lichivis. Subsequently we have the inspiring principles of liberty, equality and fraternity from the French Revolution, as well as Rousseau's dictum that sovereignty lies with the people. Similarly, we cannot forget Lincoln's mantra that democracy is 'government of the people, by the people and for the people'. In the British experiment of constitutional democracy, de jure sovereignty rests with the monarch while de facto sovereignty lies with the parliament.

Yet liberal democracy, based on the theory of representation and majority rule, has also proved to be limited. For one thing it is weakened by focusing only on formal trappings of parliaments, political parties and elections, rather than also addressing informal aspects such as class, gender and race. In addition, liberal democracy is one-sided, attending only to political aspects while neglecting other core dimensions such as economics and culture. Furthermore, liberal democracy within one country has often been associated with imperial relations with others. This tragedy has befallen the main West European states as well as the USA in more recent history.

The communist alternative of so-called 'people's democracy' has also fallen short. These situations of one-party rule invariably generated a new privileged class that dominated over the entire people. In practice people's democracies often deprived citizens of their fundamental rights and freedoms. Moreover, communist rule revealed its own imperialistic character with invasions of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Vietnam.

Hence, when conceptualizing global democracy we have to think of an alternative that avoids the pitfalls of liberal and communist approaches and instead provides real sovereign power to the people and not to political parties and their bosses. This global democracy must have at least the following six features at its core.

First, global democracy requires a polity that is not based on political parties. Instead, the basic units should be grassroots groups of the people. Policy decisions should wherever possible be taken directly by the people and with the maximum possible consensus. Real power lies at the base, and only limited powers are delegated upwards. In fact, this decentralization of power implies a situation of the least government.

Second, while global democracy would entail less government overall, it would require an expansion of global government. In a global world with global problems, such government as does exist needs to be global government. Careful thought must be given to designing this

global government, so that it avoids the main democratic shortcomings that have befallen national governments in the past.

Third, global democracy must be holistic. Political democracy is a farce without social and economic democracy. Democracy is not only a form of government, but also a way of life based on mutual tolerance and adjustment. Global democracy would need to be based on ethical and spiritual values and in that sense would involve a universal religion.

Fourth, global democracy has to encompass all countries as opposed to only some of them. We cannot think of democracy in one country. Democracy in each country is dependent on simultaneous democracy in the others.

Fifth, global democracy has to encompass all segments of society. It cannot be limited to, or disproportionately favour, a particular caste, class, culture, gender, nation or race. Global democracy and global equality must be two sides of the same coin.

Sixth and finally, global democracy is unthinkable without global peace. There cannot be 'rule by the people' on a global scale if those people are at war with each other. Thus global democracy is inextricably connected to a pedagogy of peace and a programme of disarmament.

### **Linking Fates Together: Democratic Imaginaries and Global Public Space**

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The rise of a more global world has stimulated new democratic imaginaries: different ideas of what democracy could be. However, these new conceptions of politics are as yet underdeveloped. In particular, disagreement reigns about the *location* of the governance structures that should be rendered more democratic as well as the *modality* of political action that should be adopted to enhance global democracy. It is argue here that new democratic

practice for a more global era would be best furthered with a *combination* of modalities applied simultaneously *across several scales* of activity.

Contemporary globalization has given rise to new democratic imaginaries. In contrast to older conceptions of citizenship that informed nation-building throughout the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the new formations do not assume a territorially bounded political community. These deterritorialized imaginaries have generated new languages of, for example, ‘global’, ‘transnational’ and ‘diasporic’ citizenship. Such ideas express new understandings of shared fate that can orient political engagement and generate demands for democratic accountability. However, it remains unclear what kinds of political agency would enable these altered forms of political community to generate democratic legitimacy.

One axis of disagreement about how to give substance to global democracy relates to the *location* of the governance structures that should be rendered more accountable and responsive. For example, should strivings for global democracy concentrate on global governing institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the World Bank? Or should political energies in these times of globalization remain focused on strengthening democratic processes and rights protection at the level of the national, territorially bounded state? Or should politics look to the subnational and local level for the realization of rights and democratic accountability in global affairs? How does democracy-building at one of these sites (global, national and local) relate to democracy-building on the other scales of governance? Are these complementary or conflicting processes?

A second axis of disagreement concerns the modality of political action that will yield the greatest enhancements of global democracy. For example, some activists pursue oppositional politics that seek to reveal and resist unjust concentrations of power in existing governance arrangements. Others believe in the possibilities of reform and concentrate on maximizing the democratic potential of established institutions. A third category of activists judge that existing institutions are irredeemably corrupt, being grounded in a self-interested individualism that is endemic to both capitalism and the liberal state. These transformational forces seek to enact a *prefigurative* politics that realizes new forms – or revitalizes traditional forms – of democratic

community. As with the issue of locations, questions arise whether these different modalities of political engagement are fundamentally at odds or whether they can be complementary.

The argument advanced here is that political agency in the current age of globalization can best promote democratic legitimacy by working across scales and using a combination of modalities. In this approach to global democracy the state remains key, and activists would be ill-advised to abandon the national state as a focus of efforts to enhance democratic accountability. At the same time there is no reason to insist that the national level should be the exclusive site of democratic activism. Indeed, the dynamics that produce democratic change at the national level are frequently intertwined with activism on global and local scales. Likewise, there is no contradiction in principle between pursuing democracy in different modes, and indeed democratization needs a pluralistic approach that combines resistance, reform and transformation. Critical scholarship can help to reveal in more detail the interactive relationships between the various sites and forms of political engagement, thereby helping activists to make strategic choices as to where their energies to promote global democracy might be best invested.

### **Cooperative-Harmonious Global Democracy from the Perspective of Chinese Culture**

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Global democracy can be conceptualized around the traditional Chinese thinking of *Minben* ('people-oriented governance', or 'governance for the people') and *Hehe* ('cooperative-harmonious thoughts'). *Minben* highlights the distributive justice that should lie at the heart of global democracy. Globalization should not only serve the interests of a few elites or rich countries, but also should benefit marginalized groups. *Hehe* provides a basis for dealing with diversity in the era of globalization. Its core premises include: (a) that respect for diversity is a prerequisite of co-existence; (b) that diversity does not necessarily lead to conflicts; and (c) that

a constant process of mutual construction among key stakeholders will transform potential conflicts into harmony, where different actors (both governmental and nongovernmental) find common ground to complement each other.

From this conceptual perspective, we propose that global democracy can be concretely enacted through a pragmatic process of institutional innovation involving the cooperative efforts of all stakeholders in a global society that seeks equitable and sustainable human development. Thus the proposed framework rests on three main pillars. Normatively, stakeholders in the global society approach one another as 'different but harmonious'. Procedurally, the stakeholders engage in a constant process of evolving new institutional mechanisms for their cooperation. Substantively, this cooperation is geared towards a common goal of equitable and sustainable human development.

This approach, developed from Chinese traditions, differs in important respects from prevailing mainstream ideas of global democracy. The hegemonic version of cosmopolitanism, fashionable especially in the West, thinks of global democracy in terms of (a) normatively, a clear and compelling set of universal principles; (b) procedurally, a fixed set of political institutions; and (c) substantively, the inevitably positive practical consequences of those norms and procedures. With its premise of universalism, mainstream cosmopolitanism has ruled out the possibilities of alternative democratic institutions and ignores the need for intercultural dialogue.

To avoid this pitfall, people should detach themselves from their original normative and procedural assumptions (which are unavoidably confined by their own cultural and empirical biases) and open their minds to cross-cultural learning. In this way, a hegemonic prescription of global democracy from the West can give way to an ongoing cross-cultural investigation of potential forms of global democracy for the effective solutions of existing and emerging global challenges.

Our proposed definition of global democracy seeks to overcome these limitations. On the normative side, it emphasizes the significance of cross-cultural exchange, rather than taking for granted the validity of any preordained democratic principle, Western or otherwise. Such

dialogue might reveal, for instance, that neither ‘liberal democracy’ nor ‘authoritative democracy’ deserves priority over the other, because both fail to resolve the tension between individual liberty and collective interests. Intercultural deliberation reminds each party to be self-reflective of its own values in order to avoid advocating them as universal standards and aspirations.

On the institutional side, the concept of global democracy developed here highlights the necessity of institutional innovations and refuses to accept the legitimacy of any fixed arrangement, including those today that have been inherited from an earlier time. Faced with unprecedented new problems in the era of globalization, it is of paramount importance to enhance institutional renewal. In particular it is important to shift away from zero-sum thinking about ‘national interests’ to a focus on the provision of global public goods and to shift away from state-centric institutions to multistakeholder arrangements. Such a reorientation could prompt significant reconstruction of existing global governance institutions and the creation of new global agencies for previously neglected policy areas.

On the substantive side, the touchstone of global democracy should be how globalization can yield equitable and sustainable development. To be specific, globalization should not merely cater to vested interests, but also benefit the poor; globalization should go beyond short-term gains to achieve long-term prosperity. Admittedly, the notion of development is open to diverse, and even conflicting, interpretations, but a more intercultural and institutionally innovative approach can, in the spirit of *Minben*, help to bring the voice of the disadvantaged to the forefront.

In our full paper we illustrate the fruits of this proposed approach to global democracy through an analysis of World Bank development assistance in China. In normative terms the case study suggests that adherence to the spirit of *Hehe* transformed the aid relationship between the World Bank and China from one marked by suspicion to one of trust, which helps both sides identify their different ideas, perceptions and interests and ultimately make such differences complement each other. Institutionally, this relationship of equal and mutual trust has been built on cooperative mechanisms, such as trust building, information sharing, and capacity

building, in order to achieve flexible and creative institutional developments. Substantively, the democratic aid relationship between the World Bank and China has helped to reduce poverty and enhance equitable and sustainable development in China.