



## Globalizing Democracy or Democratizing Globalism?

By Matthew S. Weinert

**Transnational Democracy: Political Spaces and Border Crossings** edited by James Anderson. London: Routledge, 2002. 224pp.

“Globalisation is putting democracy in question and is itself being questioned as undemocratic,” declares James Anderson in the first chapter of *Transnational Democracy* (6). “Its border crossings are undermining the traditional territorial basis of democracy and creating new political spaces which need democratizing” (Ibid.). We are thus confronted with a portentous choice to mitigate, ameliorate, or remedy democratic deficits in our globalizing world: either globalize democracy or democratize globalism (a term I use to encompass all features of the process of globalization).<sup>1</sup> Globalizing democracy extends the logic of “national democracy” (18) by applying institutional, representational, and voting procedures and frameworks globally to remedy or mitigate democratic deficits. Chapters by Agnew, Newman, Painter, O’Dowd, Anderson and Hamilton, and McGrew explore this theme. Alternatively, authors van der Pijl, Hirsch, Goodman, and Taylor ruminate on the possibility of democratizing globalization by creating and opening democratic spaces through (popular) participation intensive movements and reconstituting state-dominated global institutions and procedures. The implication is that transnational social movements constitute a “global demos,” a citizenry of the world that substantively transcends the territorially bounded demos of the state, and remakes the world in a transnational, if not cosmopolitan, vein.

Peter Taylor, however, regards this possibility with skepticism (240). Though healthy, such skepticism underlines a chief problem of the entire volume: the failure to answer in any effective way the question what hope is there for transnational democracy when “political reforms remain territory-based” (Ibid.)? Indeed, what forms might transnational democracy take to be an effective antidote to globalization? Does the institutional boundedness of globalizing democracy derail the radical, transformational potentials of democratizing globalism? Are participation-intensive, populist transnational movements even equipped or geared towards radically transforming institutional structures, or are they merely designed to mitigate the harsher effects of state-dominated policies and procedures? Are we too constrained by the reality of the state to constitute transnational or cosmopolitan political structures? Are transnational structures too far removed from ordinary

---

<sup>1</sup> By globalization, we may mean liberalization, internationalization, universalization, westernization, or deterritorialization.

human experience to be desirable if not effective? Transnational Democracy raises, for this writer, more questions than it appears to answer.

Especially disappointing are Taylor's equations of the global demos with "knowledge capitalists" who do their work in cities that exist within vast global urban networks (240). Knowledge capitalists, cities, and global urban networks constitute for him the basis for democratizing globalism. If the concern of the volume is to confront the antidemocratic implications and limitations of globalization, why does Taylor appeal to a particular population whose specific monied interests are in part to blame for democratic deficits? He fails to provide any convincing reason as to why the global demos should be identified more with knowledge capitalists than with transnational social movements (pro-labor, pro-environment, pro-human rights) or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), save that he asserts these types of agents have "democratic deficits themselves," insofar as they "have lost any community attachment" and fail to represent others "beyond their own network of members" (240). Further, what makes cities representative of rural areas or, moreover, of certain classes of their own denizens, including maids, nannies, the homeless, and the working poor? Surely, Taylor's knowledge capitalists and cities are not beyond reproach, and if they are, Taylor fails to tell us why.

To the issue of agency, Taylor raises salient questions that strike the heart of the transnational democratic project (if one can even begin to call it that), including questions surrounding representation (to what extent can any one institution or agent represent the interests of all, a majority, or, more vaguely put, our global world?); community (is it defined in cosmopolitan, regional, interested-based, national, or other terms?); and values (whose values?). Yet he circumvents these issues and in doing so, avoids the difficult work of discussing transnational democracy in any meaningful sense. Democracy appears more a palliative than a cure in several of this volume's chapters, an ostensibly politically correct label, an academic conceit disconnected from the varied interests and lived-experiences of ordinary human beings.

Yet democracy—as palliative, cure, label, or conceit—attained an almost mythological status after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Soviet Union. While some triumphantly announced "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1989), others were modest in their proclamations, calling the first half of the 1990s "an era, if not *the* era, of democracy" (Held 1997: 237). Democracy possesses an international legitimizing function—colloquially, a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval—and is seen by states and peoples alike as the preferred mode of governance. Several indicators confirm this.

First, free (and fair) elections herald the seemingly irrepressible global march of democracy. As instantiations of the "will of the people" (Warsaw Declaration 2000; Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21(3)), elections, so the logic goes, legitimize governments through compliance with certain normative expectations of the international community.<sup>2</sup> Manifesting the legitimizing power of elected, representative-based systems, the United Nations (UN) has received, since 1989, more than 140 requests from member states to supervise elections or assist with "the legal, technical, administrative, and human rights aspects of organizing and conducting democratic

---

<sup>2</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, GA Res. 217A (III), UN Doc A/810 (1948). Habermas asserts popular sovereignty and human rights "are the modern pillars of legal legitimacy and political power" (1994: 1). See also Franck (1992).

elections.”<sup>3</sup> The Carter Center has likewise deployed “forty-seven international election-monitoring delegations to elections in the Americas, Africa, and Asia,” including Panama (1989), Nicaragua (1990), Guyana (1992), Venezuela (1998), Nigeria (1999), Indonesia (1999), East Timor (1999), Mexico (2000), China (2001), Jamaica (2002), and Guatemala (2003).<sup>4</sup> Elections deemed free and fair by international observers validate domestic political structures, thereby demonstrating that sovereignty *does* impose costs and *is* tied to normative structures of legitimacy.<sup>5</sup>

Second, representatives from 107 states gathered in Warsaw, Poland between 26-27 June 2000 for the first global conference, “Toward a Community of Democracies,” dedicated to the promotion of democracy and advancement of “core democratic principles and practices” (Warsaw Declaration 2000). These principles include:

- The will of the people...[as] the basis of authority of government...expressed by the exercise of the right and civic duties of citizens to choose their representatives through regular, free, and fair elections with universal and equal suffrage, open to multiple parties, conducted by secret ballot, monitored by independent electoral authorities, and free of fraud and intimidation;
- The right of every person to equal access to public service and to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- The right of every person to equal protection of the law, without any discrimination as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status;
- The right of every person to freedom of opinion and of expression, including to exchange and receive ideas and information through any media, regardless of frontiers;
- The right of every person to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
- The right of every person to equal access to education;
- The right of the press to collect, report and disseminate information, news and opinions, subject only to restrictions necessary in a democratic society and prescribed by law, while bearing in mind evolving international practices in this field;
- The right of every person to respect for private family life, home, correspondence, including electronic communications, free of arbitrary or unlawful interference;
- The right of every person to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, including to establish or join their own political parties, civic groups, trade unions or other organizations with the necessary legal guarantees to allow them to operate freely on a basis of equal treatment before the law;

---

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Electoral Assistance, [http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ead/ea\\_content/ea\\_context.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ead/ea_content/ea_context.htm).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/jec/jecbio.phtml>.

<sup>5</sup> This opposes Krasner’s statement (1999: 7) that “[r]ecognition provides benefits and does not impose costs.”

- The right of persons belonging to minorities or disadvantaged groups to equal protection of the law, and the freedom to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and use their own language;
- The right of every person to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention; to be free from torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment; and to receive due process of law, including to be presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law;
- That the aforementioned rights, which are essential to full and effective participation in a democratic society, be enforced by a competent, independent and impartial judiciary open to the public, established and protected by law;
- That elected leaders uphold the law and function strictly in accordance with the constitution of the country concerned and procedures established by law;
- The right of those duly elected to form a government, assume office and fulfill the term of office as legally established;
- The obligation of an elected government to refrain from extra-constitutional actions, to allow the holding of periodic elections and to respect their results, and to relinquish power when its legal mandate ends;
- That government institutions be transparent, participatory and fully accountable to the citizenry of the country and take steps to combat corruption, which corrodes democracy;
- That the legislature be duly elected and transparent and accountable to the people;
- That civilian, democratic control over the military be established and preserved;
- That all human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social—be promoted and protected as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant human rights instruments (Warsaw Declaration 2000).

Strikingly, the Warsaw Declaration signatories championed democracy in the idiom of order in much the same fashion as the powers at the Concert of Vienna (1815) championed monarchy. Presumably, so the argument goes, well-ordered domestic conditions and structures translate into international order (defined minimally in terms of stability) and international peace. Neither are there destabilizing mass, emigrations of refugees across borders nor, as Amartya Sen (1999b: 16) has noted, famines, which tend to instigate battles over limited existing food resources.

Third, the UN General Assembly added a “democracy caucus” in October 2000 to its extant list of caucuses, which up to now have been organized by region (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, etc.) geographic formation (small islands, landlocked countries, etc.), and religion (the Islamic caucus, for example) (Crossette 2000). The democracy caucus is charged with assisting emerging democracies with the problems of maintaining independent judiciaries, negotiating diverse claims to rights and goods, and similar concerns.

Fourth, the post-Cold War world witnessed an increase in the number of civic-based organizations that reveal transnational structures, networks, and processes of power. Such networks essentially challenge spatial notions of democracy—ones that inhere in the bounded, territorial

state—by advocating cross-national democratic values of participation, representation, and equal voting, as well as what may be perceived of as “global values” of environmental protection, human rights, and the rule of law. Groups such as the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Human Rights Watch, the Carter Center, the World Wildlife Federation, Jubilee 2000, and Greenpeace have intervened in global decision-making processes—if not effected significant policy changes in their respective areas of expertise—and exposed the magnitude to which ordinary people (the demos) are excluded from global politics. Each “intrusion” into a delimited undemocratic sphere (the so-called democratic deficit of international institutions) engenders a conception of democracy freed from territorial constraints.

Yet global political life does not seem to lend itself to democracy. Major democracies like the United States and Great Britain have intervened in democracies abroad to advance their own particular interests. For instance, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), with the support of American presidents, has master-minded, instigated, or sanctioned the overthrow of democratic leaders such as Iran’s Mossadegh (1953), Guatemala’s Arbenz (1954), Bolivia’s Paz (1964), Indonesia’s Sukarno (1965), Brazil’s Goulart (1964), the Congo’s Lumumba (1961), Cambodia’s King Sihanouk (1970), Chile’s Allende (1973), the Nicaraguan Sandanistas (1980s), Grenada’s Bishop (1983), and, possibly, Fiji’s Bavadra (1987) and Venezuela’s Chavez (2002). Each leader had been democratically elected. The late John Rawls poignantly iterated that the United States, “prompted by monopolistic and oligarchic interests without the knowledge or criticism of the public,” seconded its democratic ideals to an ill-defined “national security” (Rawls 1999: 53).<sup>6</sup> American interventions in democracies abroad no doubt highlight the pursuit of state goods of capital (against the poor and middle classes, and for multinational corporations), control (expansion of that elusive sphere of influence predicated on the equally dubious, undemocratic national interest) and the instruments of violence (the 1987 coup in Fiji allegedly retaliated against the president’s intention to declare a nuclear-free zone in the South Pacific). These examples raise the pertinent question of whether the democratic principle will go the way of the 19<sup>th</sup> century monarchical principle.

Monarchy, though, failed. British (and increasingly French) liberal sentiment, combined with the populist revolutions of 1848, challenged the legitimacy of monarchical absolutism and disposed of it in favor of more democratic constitutions.<sup>7</sup> But, actions undertaken by the Concert powers were at least consistent with the express intent of the monarchical principle: buttressing monarchy over other forms of government in the interests of international order and stability. Oddly, compared to the monarchical principle, democracy appears incoherent and inconsistent with itself. That leading democracies have intervened in smaller democracies raises the dual specter that, on the one hand, while major democracies may be inherently peaceful with each other, they are *not* with regard to smaller democracies, and, on the other, major democracies often *undermine* the rule of law abroad, all the while championing it, for specious national security reasons.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Rawls takes this point from Gilbert (1992).

<sup>7</sup> On the Concert system generally, see Grant and Temperely (1952); Kissinger (1958); and Nicolson (1946).

<sup>8</sup> Consider also CIA employment of William Hoettl, Adolf Eichmann’s assistant, for espionage purposes. Declassified CIA documents record the observations of an Office of Security Services (OSS) interviewer who, writing of Hoettl, recorded that he “is, of course, dangerous...But I see no reason why we should not use him.” Hoettl added that “to avoid any accusation that we are working with a Nazi reactionary and fanatical anti-Russian, I believe that we should

Further, alignment of the major democracies with globalization, or “the new capitalism” as Cox calls it (1996: 528), tends toward the re-privatization of the economic sphere, which then frees dominant economic actors “from any form of state control or intervention.” Consequently, globalization undermines democracy by widening the gap between the rich and the poor; inducing a disproportionate relationship between finance and production, whereby the “symbolic economy” of money outstrips the “real economy” of production and distribution; and forcing underdeveloped countries to refinance old debt with new. Globalization restructures production which undermines the “power of labor in relation to capital;” stimulates migrations of people in search of better working conditions and higher wages; creates an “internal South” in the North, and “a thick layer of society [in the South] that is fully integrated into the economic North;” and encourages corporate welfare policies, which do little to improve on any substantial level the lives of workers or the environment (Cox 1996: 528).



James Anderson’s introductory essay in Transnational Democracy, which reads simultaneously as an activist handbook and a decisive critique of contemporary theory and practice, explores this theme. He argues that democracy be placed on the transnational agenda for four salient reasons: the weakening of democracy at the national state level; “democratic deficits” in transnational governance structures and mechanisms; the global hegemony of liberal democracy and; growing demands for democracy in transnational arenas by activist groups (9). Further, globalizing forces subtract from national sovereignty—forcing it “upwards” to supranational institutions, “sideways to privatized operations,” or “nowhere...as economics outruns politics and political control is simply lost to the global market” (Ibid.). Add to these ills the democratic deficits in today’s multilateral, international institutions, particularly the European Union (EU), in which democratic states employ undemocratic policy-making procedures and methods, and the problem of democracy on a global level becomes acute, to say the least.

Anderson advances a slightly radical argument: globalization, while presumably “eroding” the state, *needs* liberal democracy because of its “minimalist commitment to limited government” (10; cf. Parekh, Chapter 2). A minimalist policy agenda is absolutely necessary so as to push forward the demands of global corporate interests and, as Cox puts it, “to re-privatize the economic sphere.” Anderson’s emphasis on the exclusion of democracy from economics (19) echoes Justin Rosenberg’s conception of sovereignty in The Empire of Civil Society (1994). But the separation of politics and economics is not mutually exclusive (20). Rather, economics relies on politics since the instruments of politics coercively and legally enforce the divide to the detriment of democratic practices in the workplace (21). If, in the guise of the factory gates, the boundary between

---

keep our contact with him as indirect as possible.” Kempster (April 27, 2001: 26A). Further still, Woodrow Wilson, with the aid of prominent American intellectuals and business leaders, created the “Committee on Public Information”—a propaganda agency from which Adolf Hitler derived valuable lessons on “controlling the public mind”—to fight the “hazard facing industrialists,” meaning the “newly realized political power of the masses,” and “indoctrinate citizens with the capitalist story...until they [were] able to play back the story with remarkable fidelity” (Chomsky 1997: 2f).

economics (the private realm?) and politics (the public realm?) prevents democracy's infiltration into the workplace, then territoriality, in the guise of the state and its borders, stymies democracy's extension into global space (21). The liberal democratic state is thus implicated as globalization's precondition. Here, Anderson appeals to the 19<sup>th</sup> century image of the "mob" and its "political agitation" as "an essential, if not *the* essential element in the origins of modern representative democracy" (17f). The more democracy is "widened to include more people," the "shallower in content" it becomes (18) and the less "agitated," presumably, they are. Transplanting this logic well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century anticipates, negatively, a world in which participatory politics is more the exception than the norm. We can call this absolute sovereignty reincarnate. If its first incarnation appeared in the form of the 16<sup>th</sup> through late 18<sup>th</sup> century monarch—recall that fabled remark of Louis XIV, "*l'état c'est moi*"—then it is reincarnated as a dual divide between, on the one hand, civil society's non-political economic sphere from the state's political realm and, on the other, between domestic democracy and global anti-democracy.

And yet despite democracy's shortcomings, diverse agents rally around democracy as consistent with multiple, particularistic ends and interests. Ordinary people seek democratic forms and procedures as means to pursue individually constructed or self-determined life projects since democracy rests on the twin moral and political discoveries of "self-aware freedom and self-conscious individuality," or, in Gilbert's idiom, "democratic individuality" understood as "living a life of one's own" (1990: 2,31). Government leaders, too, at least pay lip service to core democratic values and principles to secure international legitimacy so that they may pursue their own ends (Krasner 1999: 7). And great powers use democracy and market economies to push an expansive, global capitalist agenda supportive of big business and spheres of control and, less sinisterly, if one purchases the democratic peace theory, international order and peace. But, democracy-from-above, with its emphasis on electoral, representative-based systems and political and civil rights over economic and social rights, tends to shrink democracy to Weberian mechanics by operationalizing it and equating its meaning to "whatever measures it" (Gilbert 1990: 348).<sup>9</sup> Free market ideology and policy push government out of peoples' lives (in part coincident with the peoples' will to live their lives as they see fit), and furthers the interests of the elite, which often deepens poverty, lays waste to the environment, generates apathy among voters, and weakens the populist base (and presumably opposition to government action and policy).

Here, democracy-from-below counters top-dominated forms and translates the domestic activism of citizens internationally. To paraphrase David Held (1997: 238), we might even say that transnational activism devoted to such concerns as environmental protection, defense of human rights, application of the rule of law, and increased opportunities for women in development and government demonstrates how democracy *within* states requires international democracy *among* states. The emphasis on free and fair, internationally monitored elections minimally illustrates this point. But, democracy-from-below, at least from the standpoint of the authors in Transnational Democracy, appears too limited and ineffective to remedy global democratic deficits, despite the somewhat optimistic note sounded by James Goodman, author of the 11<sup>th</sup> and penultimate chapter. He writes,

---

<sup>9</sup> See also Aristotle (1958: 1282b14 - 1283a23, 1284a17- b26).

*Neo-liberal globalism is creating a series of power-shifts and sharp democratic and legitimacy “deficits” in global politics. Economic power is increasingly exercised through cross-national corporate institutions.... Political power is increasingly vested in intergovernmental institutions or geared to the demands of private transnational agencies. Socio-cultural power is increasingly expressed in a globalised consumerism and carried through transnational media empires. However, this strengthening of transnational power sources lays the foundations for new forms of contestation and emancipation as well as domination (215).*

One could contend that Goodman places emancipatory and activist hopes in the “global demos”—and he does. But, other authors take a more cautionary note, proposing transnational, de-territorial governance schemes such as multi-level citizenship schemes (Painter, chapter 5); “transfrontier” regional organizations (O’Dowd, chapter 6); cross-border representative institutions, “economic and social dynamics” (138) and various forums on matters of pressing concerns for citizens (Anderson and Hamilton, chapter 7); and increased transparency in international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the remaking of such institutions into “technocracies” which, according to McGrew, “de-politicise...issues by redefining them as legal and technical matters which are best resolved by...experts through a process of technical deliberation and the rational application of juridical procedures” (chapter 8, 164). This last proposal appears a palliative, for technical, “color-blind” application of presumably rational rules may engender grave injustices. Any one familiar with Jamaica’s experience with IMF conditionality loans or with the Jim Crow laws of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century America would agree.<sup>10</sup>

Realistically, democracy-from-below cannot replace democracy-from-above; rather, it supplements (and even constrains on some levels) institutional apparatuses. But, neither can democracy-from-above be relied upon to promote substantive democracy transnationally. There must be some melding of the two. In this regard, programs championed by the Global South; institutions such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and International-IDEA (The Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance); volumes such as the World Bank’s Voices of the Poor; and the work of theorists Gilbert, Sen, Rawls, and Dworkin, among others, give substance to procedural models that rest on majority rule and the occasional election by appealing in some measure to more equable distributions of democratic rights and mutual regard among peoples and states. Determination of such distributions requires enduring, unfettered exchange between peoples over public political questions (Rawls 1999: §1.3, 138). Domestically, deliberation occurs between spatially bounded citizens. Internationally, deliberation portends a de-spatialized understanding of the demos in which diverse agents rally around issues of pressing global importance (Taylor, chapter 12). Here, organizations such as the World Wildlife Federation and Human Rights Watch provide appropriate forums for such exchange and expand the parameters of what constitutes the international agenda as well as its agents (Hirsch, chapter 10, discusses the democratic potential of non-governmental organizations). Deliberation and participation in turn encourage peoples and governments to “form values and priorities” and to conceptualize social and economic needs in ways that will benefit all (Sen 1999: 10f). As affirmed by the Warsaw Declaration, this involves a commitment to securing and defending a free press and the unencumbered exchange

---

<sup>10</sup> The 2001 documentary “Life and Debt” eloquently and disturbingly captures the lives of ordinary Jamaicans in the 1980s.



of ideas, public education, and the opening of various forums for public discussion and debate not limited to elections every two or four years.

Philosophically, Hegel rightly emphasized the role of education (*Bildung*) in the state and the realization of freedom: “this growth of the universality of thought is the absolute value in education” (Hegel 1952: §20, 29). For him, education not only involves the actual process and institution of education (public schools, universities, and the like), but also envelops “the cultured state of mind arrived at through education” (315, fn.58 to §20, 29). Interpreted in a Marxian vein, Hegel gets at a conception that begets populist movements. As Gilbert notes, “the educational role of political action, its impact on the integrity of the self,” should not be underestimated: namely, “the coincidence of the change of circumstances and of human activity or self-change.”<sup>11</sup> In the end, these movements underscore the “possibilities of cooperation and deliberative political action” necessary for a viable, effective, free democratic system, thus highlighting the necessity to defend space (loosely construed) within which ordinary peoples can act. If Arendt was right about the distinctiveness of politics—the critical component being natality, or the ability to act anew<sup>12</sup>—then there is an obligation to re-envision the space within which politics occurs coincident with global changes, and encourage the sort of transnational activism we have witnessed in recent decades. In this regard, democracy is not simply a domestic constitutional arrangement but an international concern; the Warsaw Declaration affirms as much. Borders must not be allowed to prevent action in one country from countering, say, oppression, in another. Recall Hegel’s insight that “slavery is an outrage on the conception of humankind,” or Marx’s, that “labor in a white skin cannot be free where in the black it is branded” (Marx 1990: 414). Both fluidity of borders and transnational activism sustain global democracy.

Unfortunately, though, state policies strongly favor large businesses that produce, for example, military hardware, and further the expansive capitalist agenda abroad. To be effective, democracy requires an atmosphere free from the scourge of money, lest politics be dominated (owned) by corporate interests—a worrisome and deplorable condition of American politics today. Since all people are understood to have an equal stake in governing, certain classes should not be allowed to wield particular advantages based on accumulated wealth or filial connection. Democracy entails equal, substantive access to systems of governance. To be internally coherent and consistent, democracy must substantiate the equal claims of all people. Here, we may formulate the idea as the equal freedom of each person (Rousseau); universal, inalienable, equal human rights (Donnelly); the equal priority of all citizens (Rawls); or the primacy of equal liberty (Dworkin). Even democracies understood as majority “wills of all” must recognize and respect the primacy of each individual lest

---

<sup>11</sup> Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, quoted in Gilbert (1990: 248).

<sup>12</sup> Arendt (1958: 8-9). The relevant passage reads: “Action, in so far as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history. Labor and work, as well as action, are also rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers. However, of the three, action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting [as opposed to behaving]. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category or political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought.” Not surprisingly, Arendt praises the distinctiveness of the American Revolution for precisely the element of natality—of creating something anew (1965: 179-214).

they produce incoherencies. As (realistic) parody, numerical majorities of the sort women possess in the United States might decide to disenfranchise men. Likewise, non-white ethnic minorities may decide to disenfranchise whites. This exaggeration reveals that, lest it devolve into a series of inconsistencies, democracy must at its core be structured towards defending the idea of equal liberty of all people. Put differently, the extension of basic rights to all is a necessary condition for democracy (even construed as majority will) to achieve a common good, as opposed to a self-negating series of wills that realize only particular, tyrannical interests. Relatedly, democracies must be non-hierarchic and non-status oriented.<sup>13</sup> If hierarchy is permitted, then under a Rawlsian argument hierarchies and resultant inequalities—or inequalities and resultant hierarchies—must benefit all. In these ways, democracies and the political movements they engender, support, and promote represent what Chomsky calls “global meliorism” (1997: 1).

Democratic regimes also must provide “opportunities for people to manage their own collective and individual affairs” (Ibid.). Democracy cannot simply be about government hand-outs. The 2000 UNDP poverty report advances this argument through its pro-poor governance programs, which include holding governments accountable to people through free and fair regular elections; adapting technology to keep people well-informed of government decisions and programs; and, significantly, devolving authority to local government and providing these new centers of authority bases the resources and capacities to be effective. The UNDP’s approach to development seeks national ownership of anti-poverty plans, not donor-driven ones that often “confuse social spending with poverty-related spending” and take up “poverty after the fact as a residual social issue” of old-style structural adjustment programs (UNDP 2000: Executive Summary).

Since the UNDP recognizes that powerlessness is a major cause of poverty (which is multidimensional and does not simply mean low-income or lack of income), it seeks to remedy this by community-based, direct-democracy style programs. A few brief examples illustrate. In the run-up to the 1999 Indonesian general election, 21 civil-society organizations “conducted a voter education campaign targeted to women, first-time voters and journalists. The campaign is estimated to have reached more than 100 million Indonesians (...) in June 1999, 117 million Indonesians turned out to vote for a new parliament.” In Bangladesh, UNDP electoral assistance and voter education programs increased voter turnout in the 1996 elections to 73 percent (from 40 percent in 1991), with a substantial increase in the number of women voters (Ibid.: 2). By their nature electoral assistance programs increase people’s access to knowledge, skills, and technology, and give people ownership, broadly construed, in programs that will alleviate the burdens of poverty.

Similarly, India amended its constitution in 1992 to allow for direct democracy initiatives in the form of *Panchayat Raj*, or

*elected institutions of self-government at district, block, and village levels. From the 3 million elected positions in these bodies, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are assigned about 660,000 seats, in proportion to their share of the population, and women get 1 million. Many women have formed discussion groups and networks to strengthen their position in the face of long-standing cultural barriers. Today, India’s system of governance is being built slowly from the bottom-up—based on direct democracy—not erected from the top-down. Civil*

---

<sup>13</sup> See Gilbert (1990: 402-22); Rawls (1971: 60): the idea that “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged such that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.”

*society organizations are joining with local government to promote change. At the village level people are conducting “social audits” of government funds to ensure accountability and transparency. Gram sabha, or village assemblies, are contesting corruption and abuses of power. Local governments are mobilizing new tax revenue and initiating development projects based on participatory consultation (Ibid.: 2f).*

In Sen’s idiom, democratic, political freedoms complement the fulfillment of economic need.

Yet, internationally, real inequities in the global market exacerbate poverty, such as the inability of poor, developing countries to “penetrate major export markets in industrial countries—in part because of the formidable walls of protection that remain” (Becker 2003). Thus while the US and the EU demand that these poor developing countries “open up their agricultural sectors—a measure that threatens to undermine their food security and spread poverty,” for years they continued to protect their own farmers. The December 1999 WTO meeting in Seattle failed to address this issue. Yielding to pressure from the developing world and the European Union (which eliminated its own farming subsidies), Washington agreed on 30 July 2004 to cut 20 percent of subsidies paid to American farmers. Such subsidies, say the World Bank, IMF, UN, and Oxfam International, “are one of the worst injustices in the global economic system, allowing rich countries to flood the global market with inexpensive food and commodities that make it impossible for largely rural, poor countries to trade their way out of poverty, much less improve their own farmers’ livelihoods” (Ibid.). This agreement seeks to make international trading rules more fair by eliminating “protectionism that is biased against developing countries,” and strengthening “the capacity of developing countries to negotiate global and regional trade agreements” (UNDP 2000: Executive Summary).

As Sen would see it the sort of activities, programs, and processes mentioned in this essay reflect, in Sen’s idiom, a shift in international political discourse from making a country fit *for* democracy to making a country fit *through* democracy (1999: 4). This in turn exhibits preoccupation with international political legitimacy, which is contingent to some degree on the form and substance of domestic constitutional structures. While, Transnational Democracy skirts the sort of issues I raise in this essay, the book does make a powerful argument in favor of de-spatializing our theoretical, conceptual, and practical understandings and experiences of democracy. James Anderson’s fine introduction and first chapter, Bhikhu Parekh’s essay on reconstituting the state, and John Agnew’s piece on the limits of (American-style) federalism as applied to transnational democracy do a wonderful job exploring the limits of current thinking. Unfortunately, they do not, in my view, push us far into alternatives. Nevertheless, these largely theoretical chapters are important, insofar as they alert the reader to existing biases and the spatial limits of our political categories and concepts, than rather propose concrete “solutions.” Other chapters in the work explore practical matters, including O’Dowd’s chapter on cross-border regional organizations; Anderson and Hamilton’s piece on conflict resolution in Ireland; and McGrew’s essay on democratizing global institutions. I found these chapters compelling, for while the ideas espoused in them seem a bit fantastical, they are ideas that have been actuated and have proved successful to some degree.

Finally, I find it curious that the authors never quite define transnational democracy, preferring instead to discuss constraints of existing institutions, practices, and conceptions of democracy. Given their proposals, though—regional parliaments, greater NGO participation in decision-making, etc.—we can surmise procedural democracy satisfies certain (unspecified) criteria of

transnational democracy. Yet procedures only account for so much democracy. Majority decisions, periodic elections, and representative assemblies, however, may undermine particular rights and liberties associated with today's liberal democracies, thereby underscoring that for democracy to remain internally consistent, it must be buttressed by ethical considerations such as guarantees of the same scheme of equal rights available to all. On second thought, the alternatives for organizing or promoting democracy transnationally—the various hypothetical and actual regional organizations and parliaments, and multi-level citizenship schemes the authors mention—*do* speak to a profound concern to extend rights to all, to expand participation and insert peoples' voices into global decision making processes. They do this not in the more direct manner in which I have composed this essay, but indirectly (albeit powerfully), by starting with the assumption that liberal democratic government's minimalist governance commitments effectively *obstruct* the development of democratic forms of governance outside (and, correspondingly, when speaking about the global economy, inside) the state. Any work towards transnational democracy must, it seems, begin by “taming” or “democratizing” the liberal democratic state. This may sound odd, to be sure. But the task of democratization is the task of ordinary peoples—the demos, understood globally. Again, the emphasis is not on democracy-from-above, but democracy-from below to make democracy-from-above more accountable, more representative, more “workable.” To this end, Anderson and Hamilton (chapter 7) write of participatory democracy schemes in the case of the Northern Ireland conflict, and invoke the Dublin-based “National Economic and Social Forum”—“a consultative body which gives marginalized groups some say in policy formulation, and included representatives of the unemployed, the disabled, women's organizations, young people, the elderly and environmental groups as well as the corporatist ‘social partners’ of business, trade unions and government” (140)— as providing a model for cross-border, invigorated, inclusive, and effective democratic space.

This, then, leaves us with the specter that globalizing democracy is, rather, a *fait accompli*. Election monitoring, a declaration of democracy by a majority of states, a democracy caucus at the UN, growth of the number and effectiveness of transnational organizations in global policy-making, and increased pressure on existing institutions to make procedures and decision-making more transparent, all speak to a global entrenchment of democracy. Globalizing democracy seems, in short, the work of states and institutions.

Alternatively, democratizing globalism requires much more work, beginning with reform of the state itself and the broadening of individual consciousness. Democratizing globalism seems, in short, the work of social movements and civic activist groups. Here, we may invoke Marx to illustrate: citizen-based movements “are not only *more*, but even *qualitatively*, democratic” than “truncated liberal regimes” and “market socialist versions of liberal theory” (Gilbert 1990: 306). In praise of the Paris Commune, Marx celebrates “the creation of a political arena in which those previously oppressed could deliberate, act, and transform society,” in which women participated “on an unheard-of scale,” and in which democratic internationalism in at least a limited scale—the election of a Pole and a German to high communal offices—triumphed (Ibid.: 249). Such language embodies the emancipatory potential that Goodman—cited earlier—has in mind. Institutions such as the National Economic and Social Forum work towards emancipation and broad levels of participation. But to be effective, any trans-spatial and transnational participatory, emancipatory, and democratic institution or cooperative schemes-between peoples must necessarily be tied to the permissive function of the state (think of North Korea; one can hardly imagine that state permitting

transnational social movements to participate in governance initiatives and policy-making). Democratizing globalism, then, begins within—within the self and within the state to confront biases and dismantle the spatial limitations of our political concepts and procedures.

## References

- Arendt, Hannah. 1958. The Human Condition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1965. On Revolution. New York: Penguin Books.
- Aristotle. 1958. The Politics of Aristotle. ed. and trans. Ernest Baker. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Becker, Elizabeth. July 31, 2004. "U.S. Will Cut Farm Subsidies in Trade Deal." *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/31/business/worldbusiness/31geneva.html>.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1997. "Market Democracy in a Neoliberal Order: Doctrines and Reality." <http://www.bigeye.com/chomsky.htm>.
- Cox, Robert. 1996. "Globalization, Multilateralism, and Democracy (1992)." in Approaches to World Order. eds. Robert Cox and Timothy Sinclair. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 524-36.
- Crossette, Barbara. October 7, 2000. "Democracies Gather at UN for First Caucus." *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/07/world/07CAUC.html>
- Franck, Thomas. 1992. "The Emerging Right to Democratic Governance." in *The American Journal of International Law* 86: 46-91.
- Fukayama, Francis. 1989. "The End of History." *The National Interest*. Summer 1989: 3 –18.
- Gilbert, Alan. 1990. Democratic Individuality. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. "Power Rivalry-Motivated Democracy." Political Theory 20(6): 681-689.
- Grant, A.J. and Harold Temperley. 1952. *Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (1789-1950)*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1994. "Human Rights and Popular Sovereignty: The Liberal and Republican Versions." *Ratio Juris* 7(1): 1-13.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. [1821] 1952. The Philosophy of Right. trans. T.M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Held, David. 1997. "Cosmopolitan Democracy and the Global Order: A New Agenda." in Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal. eds. James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press: 235-51.
- Kempster, Norman. 2001. "CIA Files: Nazis Recruited to Spy During Cold War." *Houston Chronicle*. April 27.
- Kissinger, Henry. 1958. *A World restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems and Peace, 1812-1822*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Krasner, Stephen. 1999. Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1990. Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I. trans. Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin.
- Nicolson, Harold. 1946. *The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity 1812-1822*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co.
- Rawls, John. 1971. A Theory of Justice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. The Law of Peoples. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rosenberg, Justin. 1994. The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations. London: Verso.
- Sen, Amartya. 1999a. "Democracy as a Universal Value." *Journal of Democracy* 10(3): 3-17.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999b. Development as Freedom. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- United Nations Development Program. 2000. United Nations Development Program: Human Development Report 2000. New York: United Nations.
- Warsaw Declaration. 2000. Towards a Community of Democracies Communiqué. <http://usembassy.state.gov/islamabad/wwwhpr07.html>.

---

*Matthew S. Weinert is a Marsico Lecturer in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Division at the University of Denver. His research interests include sovereignty, international law, and global governance initiatives.*