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Democratizing the Globe

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Introduction

Globalization is a frequently used, but highly contested concept. Scholars, politicians and activists differ greatly in their assessment of the extent of the phenomenon, expectations of implications, and the normative or ideological perspectives on the topic. It is subject to heated debates, to what degree national sovereignty is confined by globalization, which dimensions the phenomenon includes, how recent it really is and whether it is to be understood of as a process imposed on societies by (economic) elites or as an instance of liberty aspirations of citizens (Wappner 1995). The concept itself, while intuitively appealing, remains vague. Most will agree, that globalization is about a growing degree of interdependencies and connectiveness between previously independent, national entities, pertaining to cultural, social and economic societal realms as well as to environmental and security risks such as terrorism. It is conventionally understood that the process began in the late industrial era, gaining further impetus after World War II, through the advent of postindustrial society and its (technological) innovations as well as, lastly, through the collapse of the Iron Curtain. Critical and normative perspectives differ greatly, but most share the diagnosis that the international political arena is curiously underdeveloped, not adequately meeting the degree of interdependencies of other realms. It appears that the sovereignty of nation states is compromised by interdependencies at two interrelated levels: domestically and globally (Kymlicka 1999: 112). At home, political systems are confronted with processes and outcomes that have in part transcended national borders. In international diplomacy, governments are consequently faced with ever more topics that need coordination and cooperation – organization of which and coercive sanctioning of defection however, are not yet sufficiently institutionalized. *Critics of globalization* hence place great hope on the establishment of a global democratic order, to address the current imbalance between largely national political institutions and global problems as well as to resolve existing material contradictions. By contrast, *anti-globalists* reject the idea of transcending previous borders altogether.

In this paper, I will investigate the conditions for a global democratic order, compared to a national setting. It is discussed how different prescriptions and suggestions address these challenges. In that, my outlook will not so much be a normative one, but rather a pragmatic one. I assume as given that strengthening global governance democratically is desirable. The question investigated is not *whether* it *should* exist, but *what could* be a feasible global democratic order. Rather than contrasting normative ideals with reality, I will investigate realistic options to arrive at suggestions. In evaluating what role non-governmental organizations *should* play in that order, I

take a more normative perspective. Hunches for solutions and prescriptions for global democracy conclude the discussion.

Conditions for a Feasible Global Democratic Order

The basic axiom of the international arena is the notion of the equal, sovereign autonomy of all states. Given the current political incentive structures it appears unrealistic to assume that the Westphalian state will be comprehensibly replaced anytime soon. It appears, that deviations from the realist view of international relations occur only in small regional entities, such as the European Union or with regards to very few thematic foci, such as Human Rights and martial law, a realm in which incentive structures of different nation states are in fact similar. The Westphalian setup hence must mark the starting point for any global democratic order.

Held's cosmopolitan prescription, according to which states would cease to be "the sole centres of legitimate power within their own borders" (1995: 230) is fundamentally incompatible with this notion. His suggestion for a direct democratic accountability of inter-governmental institutions (IGOs) – which are, in his perspective, effectively (con)federal institutions – is at odds with sovereign autonomy on yet another level: it calls for equal participation of all *citizens*, not all states. The complicated institutional setup of the EU and its twisted weighting of votes suggest that states are – even in comparatively harmonious settings – unwilling to easily bow to the concept of popular representation in IGOs (compare Dahl 1989).

Political incentive structures are important not only with regards to national sovereignty, but also in themselves. Liberal, representative democracy, dating back to Madison, rests on the assumption that cleavages will be fluent (as cited in Held 1996). Liberal theory cherishes diversity, pluralism and size of constituencies because it assumes that the produced shifting alliances will be able to cooperate fruitfully. Cooperation of course, requires, that, at least, globally over all issues there is a *common good*, a gain for everyone or that fluent cleavages allow for issue linkages (Reilly 2002, Kymlicka 1999). If a polity is characterized by zero-sum relations of static, homogeneous entities, it is bound to be paralysed. Reilly has suggested that the existence of even domestic, let alone transnational cross-cutting cleavages is intimately tied to the degree of modernization and functional differentiation of a given society (2002). Considering the vastly different degrees of development on the globe, it seems at least questionable, whether fluent cleavages will materialize

on the global level – a concern that the cosmopolitan perspective fails to address (compare Held 1995: 230).

Kymlicka has insightfully pointed out that “democracy is not just a formula for aggregating votes, but (that) it is a system of collective deliberation and legitimation” (1999: 119). Deliberation, another pre-condition for cooperation, rests on effective communication. While his assumption that politics for its ritualistic and affective elements, ultimately, are “in the vernacular” (1999: 120, 2001) may be too strict, it seems feasible that the lack of an effective system of public deliberation as well as language barriers between all peoples may curb chances for cooperation. Note, that international diplomacy, by contrast, has for long institutionalized such a forum.

Deliberation and cooperation require, amongst understanding mutual trust, both of which may in turn rely on “some sense of commonality or shared identity” (Kymlicka 1999: 120). Much in line with the question of cross-cutting cleavages, it appears yet impossible to conceive of a meaningful globally shared identity. The most encompassing identity communities, if at all, seemingly are the nation-states, with the possible exception of the EU (ibid).

Aside from cooperation, democracy, according to Zürn entails the notion that “decisions are normatively justifiable” (1998: 363, own translation). Following such an outcome-centered perspective, as opposed to a merely process-oriented understanding of democracy, the question arises, whether there is a coherent set of normative orientations over all societies that would allow for common justifications in a direct democratic process. Again, vast differences in development, and intimately tied to that, value orientations suggest otherwise.

In contrast to this outcome-orientation, some suggest to abandon the requirement of common identity for democracy altogether, and to rather satisfy these needs for attachment and belonging in private, associational life (Zürn 1998: 363). This suggestion fails to acknowledge the instrumentalist value of identity for democracy, that should be apparent even from a process perspective: cooperation, especially in a liberal democracy always requires some degree of solidarity. Solidarity is inherent in the concept of minority protection as well as all consociational democratic thought and in the principle of inclusiveness, to name just a few.

A Critical Analysis of NGOs

In the debate on global democratic governance, NGOs have played a prominent role. It has been argued that they help to build the abovementioned global sphere of deliberation by providing and acting in a transnational forum (Wappner 1995). Such a “global civil society” (37) is a realm, in

Wappner's words above the individual, but beyond the state and its borders. The case has been made, that NGOs have developed a kind of *civic power* by repeatedly confronting IGOs with their demands and mobilizing the citizens of respective member states: semi-institutionalized consultations with NGOs, both for their knowledge and their opinions, are now part of the proceedings of many IGOs, such as the WTO (Wappner 1995). The empirical picture of the international scene, according to Wappner, is now a pluralist one: the state is now challenged by multi-national cooperations (MNCs), IGOs and NGOs whose conventional practices of consultation are "growing into mechanisms for governance" (Wappner 1995: 37).

Claims have been made that NGOs should be further included in the proceedings of IGOs. Kymlicka, for instance, has suggested to give Greenpeace a seat in the UN General Assembly (1999: 123).

I believe that a few aspects of NGOs in general, and their current international role, specifically are seen too naively.

First, from a outcome-perspective, I observe a normative bias towards NGOs – for some reason it is tacitly always assumed that these organizations are constructive and progressive, to the degree that it is now believed that certain issues – for example human rights or environmental protection – are as such manifest in them, a misconception that is reflected in the abovementioned now-conventional consultation procedures of IGOs. It is however necessary to not only analytically, but also in political practice, keep these two things apart: the interest an NGO *claims to represent* and the organization itself and its actual agenda. Scholars and IGOs have in their argument and in their practice not yet considered the possibility of "bad" NGOs, that could be reactionary, anti-globalist, fundamentalist or even militant. The palestinian *Hamas*, albeit still a local phenomenon, or the islamistic terror-network (?) *Al-Qaeda* could be seen as precursors of such movements: the former combining militant violence and territorial aggression against Israel with "classical" NGO features, such welfare-services, and the latter merging terror with a transnational structure and a collectively binding goal, the creation of the *umma* (Castell 1999).

Aside from these substantial concerns, there are structural features of NGOs that I find worthy of critical consideration. Non-governmental movements are usually de-differentiated and anti-hierarchical in their internal network organisations. Network theorists have often cherished their subject of study to be a democratizing phenomenon – a conception that, on second thought, seems questionable to say the least. Networks, being comprised of horizontally organized "autonomous interconnected nodes" (Castells 2004: 3) can by definition not be subject to social

control. Democratic *rule*, however is always about *collectively binding* decisions. This is part of what contributes to a democratic deficit of NGOs: it explains why NGOs are often poorly internally democratic, and also spells doubt on the democratic nature of the whole industry of social movements (McCarthy & Zald 1982).

Also, it is not necessarily the case that NGOs fulfill the democratic criterion of *inclusiveness*. Resource Mobilization Theory has forcefully explained why informal membership control remains effective in the absence of formal mechanisms: People with more resources have a higher chance of participating in an NGO. They can, in fact be elitist, with regards to material resources, as well as time and language skills (Offe 1985, Wappner 1995). Contrary to the public image, NGOs are usually not made up of ordinary people on the streets.

NGOs are also undemocratic by the criterion of *accountability* – following a pluralist logic of interest representation, everyone is free to join or found an organization, but there is no systematic mechanism for legitimation. The will of those who are not part of the movement is not *represented*.

From an instrumentalist point of view, also the political incentive structures and typical issues of NGOs are problematic for a well-functioning democratic system. Typically, these organizations make protest demands, following a negative logic (“against”, “stop” ...) (Offe 1985). Their claims are not part of an encompassing agenda, but are non-negotiable single issues. Consequently, NGOs do not have to face trade-offs between goods, and they are structurally incapable of bargaining, compromise and issue-linkages (ibid., Archibugi & Held 1995: 88). While this is an effective strategy to mobilize people and to communicate concerns, it is an incentive structure that is deeply detrimental to any democratic political process, as argued in the above.

Conclusion & Prescriptions for an International Democracy

My prescription on the role of NGOs in global democracy is clear. They should be understood as what they are: particularistic interest representations. It may be, that the current prominence of Greenpeace, Amnesty International et al. is caused by a certain power vacuum on the international arena: MNCs have been discredited and IGOs have often failed to effectively facilitate cooperation between states. What is left, are the NGOs, who have managed to be popularly understood as the quasi-natural advocates of the issues they represent.

Pluralist theorists see an intrinsic value in political participation of the social movement kind. However, pluralism conceptualizes these as contestants on a market of ideas, ideas, which

eventually will be put forth to the democratic forum. Currently, NGOs have in part extended over advocating their issues – a legitimate, and intrinsically as well as instrumentally valuable process – and have captured parts of the global democratic process itself, in which they participate.

The vacuum has to be filled otherwise, namely by the only entity in which democracy has been implemented, to date: the nation state, or more specifically, its legislatures. NGOs can play a valuable, albeit less powerful role, in fulfilling deliberative functions: they can facilitate communication between and within states on issues of a global significance or reach (Wappner 1995, Kymlicka 1999: 123).

A direct international democratic order, is, as I argue in the above not feasible anytime soon. Dahl may be right in suspecting that “national democracy cannot be recreated outside the nation state” (1989). Rather, to democratize the international arena, national parliaments should expand their legislative power over their respective governments diplomatic undertakings. Similarly, national publics should debate “amongst themselves, in their vernacular” (Kymlicka 1999: 123) more intensely, how they “wish to respond to the forces of globalization” (ibid. 118) and which stance they desire their governments to take in an IGO.

In that, I support the notion of an *indirect, international democracy*, rather than that of a *direct, cosmopolitan order* (Wendt as cited in Shapiro & Hacker-Córdon 1999: 8f): public decision-making and political debate should be vested with the only capable entity, the nation state. Kymlicka rightfully cautions us, that if the above conditions for a global democratic order are not met by cosmopolitan projects, they could in fact undermine (national) democratic citizenship in these “situations where effective transnational communication (, cooperation) and a public sphere is missing” (1999: 125).

Taking the nation state as an objective reality is of course problematic from a constructivist point of view. The nation state is, as functionalist Gellner has argued, a by-product of the transition from agrarian to industrial society, in which it served as a comprehensive identity marker to facilitate mobility and engineer homogeneity, both of which are requirements for modern societies. Consequently, national identity may as well be a product as a precursor of the Westphalian state (Wendt 1999: 123). Understanding it as a reality, may hence contribute to a reinforcement of the concept and citizen’s identities. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the very transition that Gellner mentions is not yet or to differing degrees completed by different societies, some of which have opted for entirely different routes of development. While the Westphalian order is as such hardly contested, not all states of which it is made up of are nation states in Gellner’s sense.

This prescription needs to be further developed on two aspects. First, for the argument to carry, democracy has to be proliferated amongst all countries. Secondly, the indirectly democratic decision procedures of IGOs have to be revised. Adjustments need to be made, where power imbalances are in place, that can neither be justified by the criterion of equal sovereign equality (one state one vote) or by the criterion of equal representation of population sizes. The international community must seek to eliminate imbalances reflecting military or economic might. A balance has to be found between the two criteria for weighted voting.

Sure enough, all of these decisions are difficult to make in the Westphalian order, where essentially anarchy between states is the ultimate game in town. International democracy is in many respects going for the “*second best*” (Wendt 1999: 123).

However, if we are to be successful in democratizing the globe at all, then through this process, that aims at reconciling the nation state with global democracy, slowly reforming the Westphalian order and reshaping political identities instead of paralysing the system with a cosmopolitan setup, a successful implementation of which surely is decades away.

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