

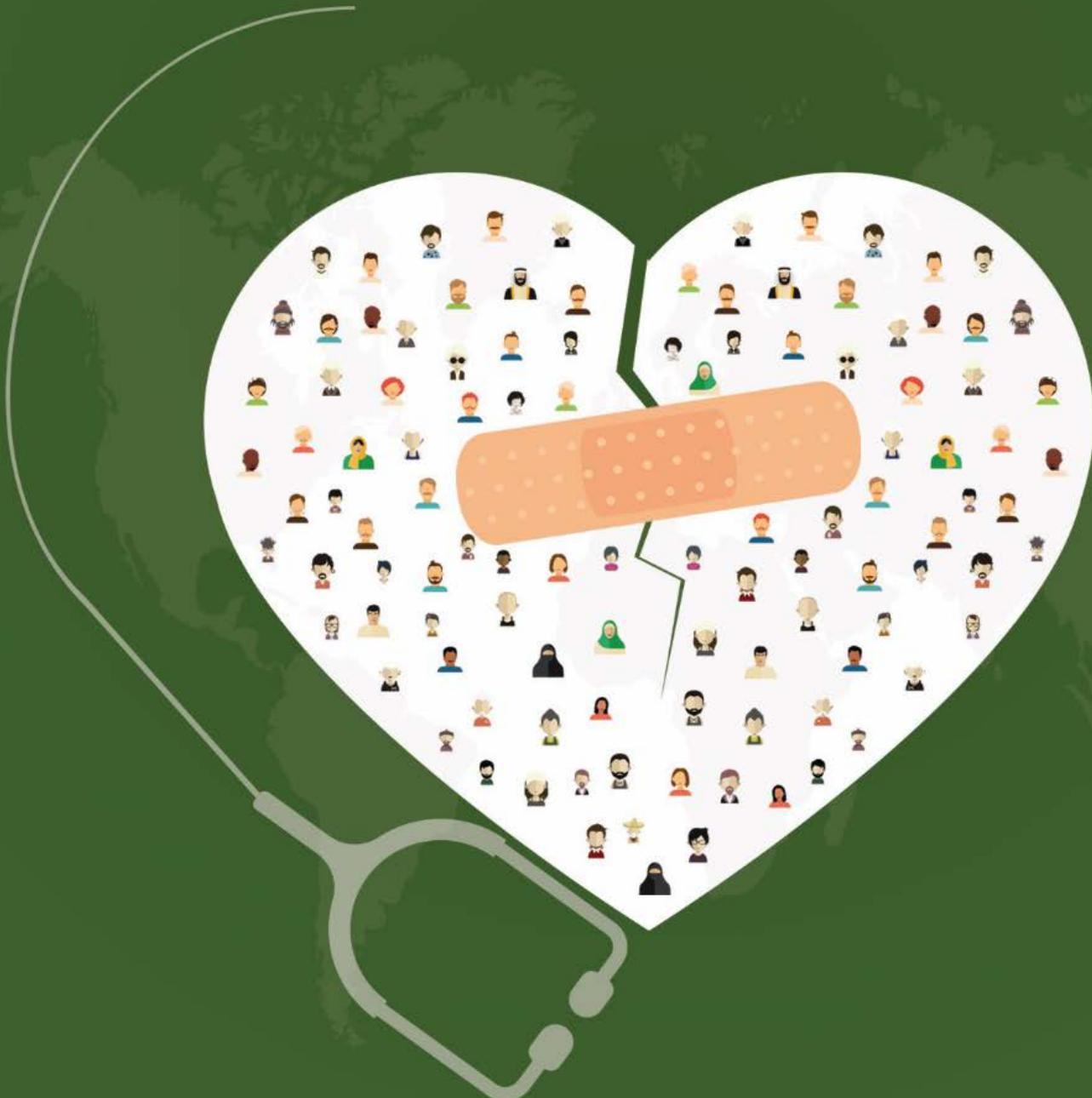


# Promotio Iustitiae

Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES), General Curia of the Society of Jesus, Rome, Italy

## HEALING DEMOCRACY

In an Era of Authoritarianism & Populism





# **Healing Democracy**

## **in an Era of Authoritarianism and Populism**



**Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES)**  
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## Editorial

**Xavier Jeyaraj, SJ**

The Pandemic has made health a priority. However more than the physical health of an individual, the democratic health of many nations is under serious threat. Pope Francis in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* strongly critiques both the neo-liberal economy and the nationalist and populist kind of politics. He says, “Instances of a myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism” that are on rise are the “signs of regression” (FT 11). In a recent interview, Fr. General Arturo Sosa said, “One of the victims of the pandemic could be democracy, if we do not take care of our political condition. Taking the path of authoritarianism is a big temptation for many governments, even so-called democratic governments.”

“Is democracy in danger?” This is probably a question that none of us would have ever thought of asking 10 or 20 years ago, and that too in countries where democracies and democratic structures were upheld with utmost respect and sacredness. We all thought that it would be absolutely impossible to destroy democracies. We said, the foundations of our democracies are quite strong. Our Constitutions are sacred and our judiciary will protect us. We thought that we have every mechanism needed to protect the sacredness of democracy. Sadly, today we are forced to ask the question “Is democracy in danger?”

We are quite aware that democracies were destroyed by military rulers and dictators in Africa and Latin America in the 70s or 80s. Sadly, what is happening today is deeply alarming because democracies are getting demolished not by military generals but by democratically elected leaders, Presidents, Prime ministers and Members of Parliaments by using the very same democratic means and structures. Here is the real danger.

Democracy had its critics all along just as any other political system. But it was accepted as the best available system by many nations. Since the 1980s the health of democracy began to diminish with a rise of market economies and this became more perturbing since 2000. Today, it looks like democracy is in the Intensive Cardiac Care Unit (ICCU), requiring an open-heart surgery.

According to 2019 Democracy index of the *Economist*, out of 167 countries in the world, 54 are under ‘authoritarian regimes’, 37 under ‘hybrid regimes’, 54 under ‘flawed democracies’, and leaving only 22 with full democracies. The average global score of

democracy fell from 5.48 in 2018 to 5.44 in 2019 (on a scale of 0-10). The major set-back came from Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and also Asia and Eastern and Western Europe. Larry Diamond, a renowned democracy scholar says, “We have been going through a democracy recession” and the pandemic is “deepening and accelerating the recession”.

The increasing inequality between the rich and the poor, the growing nexus between corporates, media and political parties further threatens the very essence of democracy and social cohesion. According to an Oxfam study, “When wealth captures government policymaking, the rules bend to favour the rich, to the detriment of everyone else. The consequences include the erosion of democratic governance, the pulling apart of social cohesion, and the vanishing of equal opportunities for all” (Oxford briefing 178, 2014). The recent UNDP report 2019 warns saying “rising inequality is destabilizing democracies around the world.”

A deeply alarming trend that is emerging in many democracies is the rise of populism. A recent study by Yascha Mounk and Jordan Kyle identified 46 populist leaders across 33 democratic countries between 1990 and 2018. Their empirical study and analysis show that a) populists were highly skilled at staying in power longer than the non-populist leaders; b) many of them rewrote or amended their country’s constitutions and laws; c) many controlled or manipulated the media and independent institutions, and d) many weakened civil, political and democratic rights of citizens. The populist leaders soar to power riding on the anger against scandals by previous governments with a promise to root out corruption and bring in the golden era of prosperity and abundance. Sadly, as the economist Barry Eichengreen puts it, “they simply replaced the mainstream’s alligators with even more deadly ones of their own.” Corruption and kick-backs got institutionalised with no transparency. Nationalism, and developmentalism became the catch phrase to remain popular although according to the data on human rights, unity among people or socio-economic progress of the country reflect regress.

The present *Promotio Iustitiae* no. 130 brings together 20 well-reflected articles written by experts who have been working on the challenges of democracy from all the six Jesuit Conferences. The authors highlight, with concrete situations and examples, what has led to the recession of democracy and democratic structures in the recent years and why democracy has lost its focus and the forward momentum in many countries. The authors not only highlight the obstacles and the challenges faced in their respective countries, but also suggest ways to remedy the crisis.

In the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (FT) Pope Francis proposes a remedy, particularly in Chapter 8: Religions at the service of fraternity in the world. Besides, he gives numerous suggestions throughout the encyclical namely, to dream together for a better and a humane world. He invites us to work towards combatting racism and sexism; to welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants and refugees; to look at the causes of poverty, violence and exclusion; debt forgiveness for impoverished nations; a strong role of the UN and for regional alliances; to care for our common home. One group of people that Pope Francis praises are the popular social movements. He says that they are:

“Sowers of change, promoters of a process involving millions of actions, great and small, creatively intertwined like words in a poem’. In that sense, such movements are ‘social poets’ that, in their own way, work, propose, promote and liberate. They help make possible an integral human development that goes beyond ‘the idea of social policies being a policy *for* the poor, but never *with* the poor and never *of* the poor, much less part of a project that reunites peoples’. They may be troublesome, and certain ‘theorists’ may find it hard to classify them, yet we must find the courage to acknowledge that, without them, ‘democracy atrophies, turns into a mere word, a formality; it loses its representative character and becomes disembodied, since it leaves out the people in their daily struggle for dignity, in the building of their future’”. (FT 169)

As I conclude this editorial, I wish to remember two inspiring Jesuits who have played a vital role in our Social Justice and Ecology works in two different Conferences: one in Latin America and another in South Asia. **Fr. Jorge Cela Carvajal, SJ**, a former President of the Jesuit Conference of Latin America (CPAL) and a former International Coordinator of *Fe y Alegria*, returned to the Father on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Jorge was a simple man, but stood tall in terms of being a visionary and an enterprising person. He was a great Jesuit, a great companion, and a wonderful human being! May God grant him eternal rest! He was very knowledgeable about matters concerning governance, participation and democracy. Hence, we feel very privileged and honoured to include in this issue of *Promotio Iustitiae* his recent article entitled “Is hope still possible?”

We also remember **Fr. Stan Swamy SJ**, an 83-year-old Jesuit from the Jamshedpur Province in India. Fr. Stan, a strong defender of the rights of the *adivasis* (indigenous people) in India, and an activist who spoke, wrote and worked relentlessly for the rights of vulnerable people, was arrested on charges of sedition under a draconian law, Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act (UAPA) and imprisoned since 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020 in Mumbai. His unjust imprisonment shows the erosion of democracy in India. All of us want to stand in solidarity with Fr. Stan (#standwithstan) and many others who are unjustly languishing in various prisons, not only in India but also over the world. We call for the release of Stan and all other unjustly imprisoned human rights defenders.

*Original in English*



## Repairing the Health of American Democracy

**Patrick McCormick**

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In the run-up to and immediate wake of the 2020 presidential election a large number of Americans are deeply concerned about the health of our democracy, and while alarmist sentiments often surface in a hotly contested election season most political commentators agree the current anxiety is extraordinary, widespread, and justified. The causes for this striking decline of confidence in our democracy are partly to be found in the unprecedented and disturbing conduct and speech of our outgoing president and his supporters and partly in a number of deeper trends in American society reaching back several decades.

The rise, election and presidency of Donald Trump has been an increasingly disturbing phenomenon for the majority of Americans, most of the nation's free press, the bulk of its diplomats, and large swaths of its federal agencies and civil service, and has provoked deep and widespread concern and complaint among the nation's longstanding democratic allies. The substantial complaints against Trump have focused upon speech and conduct threatening or undermining the checks and balances of our democratic structures, the civility of public and political discourse, the civil, political and legal rights of religious and racial minorities, the authority of the judiciary, the credibility and access of the free press, the ability of numerous federal agencies to serve the American people without political bias or interference, the stability of longstanding alliances with other democratic nations, and, most recently, the further undermining of our shared confidence in the electoral process.

First, since his election Trump has made countless spurious accusations about the fairness of our electoral process and the unproven threat of voter suppression, while refusing to acknowledge or address proven foreign interference in the 2016 election. More recently, he has resisted efforts to make voting less dangerous or more accessible in the midst of a pandemic, discouraged, undermined and lied about widespread participation in mail in voting, and made repeated inflammatory statements about his unwillingness to abide by the electoral process. In all of this he undermined voter confidence in the electoral process, weakened the ability of minorities and his opponents to vote, and provided his supporters reasons to ignore or resist unfavourable electoral results. And, indeed in the days and weeks after the election he has launched a barrage of fatuous complaints and lies about the fairness of the voting process and count, and encouraged leaders of his party and disappointed followers to take up this senseless and dangerous rant.

Second, since the opening gambit of his 2016 campaign, Trump has scapegoated, vilified, and withdrawn or violated the rights, legal protections and safety of migrants, refugees and racial and religious minorities. Fuelling racist and xenophobic backlashes against, among other things, the current immigration crisis and the predicted decline of a white majority in the coming decades, Trump has repeated, supported or refused to criticize white supremacist speech or behaviour, even when violent or deadly, while failing to defend people of colour threatened or disturbed by extremist violence or excessive police force, and has organized his campaign and presidency around coded messages signalling a support for white nationalism.

Third, in responding to constitutional checks and balances on his authority and critics of his policies and statements the administration has engaged in systematic campaigns of misinformation on every topic from attendance at his 2017 inauguration to the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the US. In a presidency characterized by over 20,000 false statements and committed to fomenting informational chaos through the daily release of a cascade of false, inflammatory and distracting “alternative facts,” the Trump administration has sought to undermine the authority, credibility and influence of the free press, federal oversight and watchdog agencies, the judiciary, his own intelligence community and diplomatic corps, as well as the medical and scientific communities. This steady barrage of falsehoods, insults and slanderous comments weakens citizens’ confidence in the reliability of expert, objective or scientific information, and replaces reasoned argument with name-calling, ridicule and lies, rendering informed discourse and shared decision making impossible.

Fourth, throughout his campaign and presidency Trump has demonstrated an authoritarian disdain for any democratic or constitutional limits on his actions or policies, vilified or punished those who sought to enforce such checks, bragged about his ability to flout the law with impunity, and supported, praised, excused and pardoned persons and groups acting with similar disregard for the rule of law. Meanwhile, on the international scene the President has retreated from or abandoned a series of treaties and alliances, demonstrated a marked disregard for longstanding democratic allies and their leaders, and cozied up to authoritarian rulers even as they acted – sometimes criminally – against US laws and interests or violated the human rights of their people and/or the peace and stability of the region.

In all of this the candidate and President has modelled and encouraged a personal and national narcissism disinterested in the checks and balances of democratic institutions, or the value of collaboration or diplomacy, demonstrating instead a will to power, a disregard for truth, and a disdain for critics and opponents. At the same time, this populist leader has found and excited an aggrieved base of largely white Christian nationalists savouring his rancorous approach to politics and exhibiting little desire to restrain his authoritarian tendencies.

Still, the immediate threat this presidency presents to the health of American democracy is connected to larger longstanding patterns within the country, patterns Trump has tapped into or inflamed, not invented.

The first cause of the declining health of US democracy is our exceptional and escalating economic inequality, currently higher than at any point in the previous half century and than

any European nation. This extraordinary and increasing gap between America's rich and poor and the concomitant shrinking of the US middle class is caused in large part by the failure to improve the federal minimum wage, the stagnation of blue-collar wages, and tax policies benefitting the nation's wealthiest top quintile and (especially) its richest 1%.

The harms of this staggering level of economic inequality to the health of our democracy are numerous. Americans increasingly find themselves in two separate and unequal societies, with different life spans, health outcomes, educational and employment opportunities, and access to the halls of political power. Government policies making it possible to escape poverty or recover from job losses have been withdrawn or weakened, making it more difficult for tens of millions to achieve or sustain the American dream of economic progress. Meanwhile, the nations wealthiest have grown phenomenally richer and gained nearly unlimited access to and influence over its elected officials, tax and spending policies, and regulatory agencies.

Second, centuries of racism have marred the landscape of American democracy. Longstanding government supported practices of segregation and discrimination in housing, education and employment, accompanied by the "New Jim Crow" of over four decades of mass incarceration disproportionately imprisoning and disenfranchising African Americans, and the Supreme Court's cancellation of the 1965 Voting Rights Act have all contributed to an economic and political disenfranchisement of people of colour. In addition, the disproportionate use of police force against African Americans and other racial minorities has alienated these communities from law enforcement and exposed the racial bias of our criminal justice system.

The taint of racial injustice has been deepened by several decades of a national politics of "white grievance" during which candidates of both parties (but increasingly of one party) have employed coded messages focused on "law and order" and casting minorities and migrants as criminals or illegals to appeal to white voters anxious about a threatened loss of status or dominance. The creation of the world's largest prison system and disenfranchisement of over six million Americans and the growing hysteria over millions of undocumented laborers picking most of America's fruits and vegetables are direct results of a cynical political strategy to manipulate the fears of white Christian nationalists and disenfranchise millions of people of colour.

Third, recent decades have seen transformations of the mainstream press and an explosion of the power of social media often weakening our capacity for informed and civil discourse. Not long ago most American got their TV news from one of three or four national mainstream broadcasters, while more than sixty million readers subscribed to a daily newspaper seeking a wide audience. Today most viewers can select a cable or radio news outlet tuned to confirm and intensify their political biases, while over a third of daily newspapers have shuttered and the ranks of reporters and readers have been cut in half. In place of these shared news outlets tens of millions now get their information from social media outlets geared to fuel their confirmation biases and ideological passions without providing comparable protections for objectivity or accuracy.

This atomization of American society into polarized tribes of red and blue voters has been accompanied by a deepening disregard for objective, scientific, or, more recently, medical information about important issues, and a rising conviction that persons are entitled to their own opinions and their own facts. This has meant a growing disdain not only for facts or evidence offered by their opponents or critics but also by those experts with oversight responsibilities, as well as an unwillingness to examine the consistency of their own group's statements or policies. Such disregard for truth and evidence severely weaken the possibility of achieving democratic consensus on issues or resolution of challenges.

Fourth, something must be said about the contribution of religion to the current malaise of American democracy, particularly the negative impact of white largely evangelical Christianity. For decades the bulk of white conservative Christian Churches and voters have been at the heart of a political movement of "white complaint" reacting to the racial progress of the Civil Rights movement, supporting the wars on crime and drugs behind the "New Jim Crow" of mass incarceration. This same largely evangelical white Christian community has ignored religious and biblical calls to welcome and love the stranger while supporting xenophobic and racist speech and policies in response to immigration from Mexico and Central America. It has also largely resisted efforts to provide a national health care system or expand Medicare, to set limits on the nation's uniquely widespread and deadly use of firearms, and to acknowledge or address the climate change crisis threatening the planet.

While the US remains the most religious of post-industrial nations, religion in America has been shaped by a free market approach encouraging members to join or create the Church best reflecting their personal beliefs. Not surprisingly, more Americans belong to local breakaway Churches reflecting their specific beliefs and disinclined to challenge their political or racial biases. Also, not surprisingly, American Churches are highly segregated by race and class, and so a large percentage of white Christians find themselves in Churches where their racial bias remains largely unchallenged. In addition, there is an unseemly fit between populist resistance to uncomfortable facts and the increasingly defended religious right to believe or behave as one chooses or the presumed moral superiority or immunity of religious beliefs as distinct from mere biases or prejudices. All too often Americans unwilling to acknowledge challenging facts about the climate or science or respect the legal rights of others can take cover in religious rights to believe and behave as they wish.

Healing American democracy begins with recognizing and addressing the harms of this nation's exceptional and burgeoning economic inequality. At the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Social Teaching called attention to the crippling injustices created by the huge disparity of income and wealth produced by an unregulated approach to the industrial revolution. Nearly a century ago those same teachings warned of a "tyranny of capitalism" that increasingly concentrated economic and political power in the hands of a shrinking oligarchy, while a later pope argued that grotesque economic inequality would inevitably undermine and corrupt democratic political structures. As a remedy for this inequality Catholic Social Teaching called upon the state to improve the wages, working conditions and economic and political participation of laborers, to ensure legal protections for the rights of

the poor, and to set limits on the exercise of economic and political power by the rich. Similar remedies are required today if we are to prevent further decay in our democratic structures.

The recovery of our democracy from its current malaise also requires dealing afresh with the cancer of American racism. The reforms of Reconstruction and the Civil Rights movements made strides towards a more democratic society, but were followed by regressive movements of white backlash, and in the past four decades the “New Jim Crow” of mass incarceration, a widespread retreat from the Voting Rights Act, and the ascendancy of a politics of “white complaint” reflects a nation unwilling to acknowledge or repent its enduring structural racism, and indeed occasionally doubling down on this bigotry through the public support of white nationalism. America needs to repent of its “original sin” of racism by emulating democracies like Germany that have publicly confessed and sought to make amends for its racist past and continue to publicly condemn outbreaks of racism in its populace. This national confession requires truthful accounts of both the history of slavery and Jim Crow and the ongoing presence of institutional racism in our political, economic and religious institutions. And it requires – at the very least – the ongoing reform of our electoral processes, and our criminal justice and educational systems. In the present moment our democracy needs to be repaired by removing public symbols celebrating racism and slavery and by giving full throated support to the reform of policing and the criminal justice system in the United States.

The repair of democracy requires a fresh national education in civics and the importance of the Common Good. A people called to “form a more perfect union” have a duty to pull back from polarizing and demonizing speech and to be critical – even self-critical – in their consumption of news. Americans need to seek out accurate and objective information and analysis about the critical issues facing us as a democratic people, to read broadly and deeply on these matters, and to beware of both the bias and inflammatory character of many available news sources. Current research into how our thinking can be manipulated by playing into or inflaming various cognitive biases means we need to take special and intentional care to avoid the influence of populist and authoritarian demagogues and those using social media to derail our informed and deliberate decisions.

Finally, reforming American democracy requires holding up a critical mirror to a large swath of American Christianity captured by a culture of “white complaint” and more interested in defending a white nationalist vision of national security than building a just, peaceful and welcoming society. Religious voices have much to contribute to the revitalization of American democracy, reminding us of the dignity and sanctity of all persons and groups, commanding us to stand in solidarity with and never scapegoat or abandon minorities, strangers and the poor, warning us of the threats tyrants, excessive wealth and avarice pose to the health of the community, and urging us to protect and care for creation. Still, Scripture itself is filled with warnings about dangerous and harmful religious attitudes and practices, and history is replete with stories of religion captured by corrupt ideologies and cultures. Repairing our democracy requires challenging and undoing the cultural capture of white Christianity in this country.

*Original in English*



## **Integral Ecology and Democracy in the United States: Reflecting on the Road Ahead**

**Fernando C. Saldivar, SJ**

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People in the United States tend to think not only that we perfected constitutional democracy, but we also take our institutional stability for granted. No matter how much we disagree with our elected leaders, rail against the inequalities of the market, or continue to divide ourselves into enclaves based on race and class, there remains embedded in the American psyche an almost Pollyannaish trust in the rule of law. Authoritarianism and populism are problems for other countries. No matter how bad things are now, things will eventually return to normal. We take our founding myths as holy writ: the United States is not like other countries and Americans are not like any other people. That is the hubris of American exceptionalism, not only that we are different, but that we are better and smarter than the rest of you. We will figure this crisis out and weather the storm, simply because that is who we are. What in any other country would cause us to stand up and take notice, in our own we cross our fingers, hope for the best, and trust that the system will eventually right itself.

How dangerously naive that worldview is comes into focus when you can see it from the outside, when you can appreciate, as an American, what the U.S. looks and feels like from abroad. My vantage point is that of a U.S. Jesuit, an attorney by training, missioned to the Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network (JENA) in Nairobi, Kenya. Experiencing the closing months of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, definitely the most contentious of my lifetime, from the other side of the world has been eye-opening and has challenged me to reflect on the road ahead for my home country.

It is easy enough for most Americans abroad, myself included, to wag a sanctimonious finger at any number of African states and bemoan the health of their democracies. However, in the wake of the U.S. election we are called to consider what the deeper meaning of the results might be. Yes, Donald Trump was defeated at the polls, but the fact remains that in losing he garnered more votes for president than any other candidate in history – with the exception of the one who beat him, Joe Biden. More than 72 million Americans took a look at President Trump's record, weighed everything he has said and done in the last four years, and ratified it by casting a ballot to give him a second term in office. This radical disconnect in visions of where the U.S. should be headed is not something that a change in administration alone will fix. The elephant in the room, the critically ill democracy that Americans are loath to recognize, is their own.

Americans are hard wired to think, “It can’t happen here.” Tanks in the street, violent confrontations between political partisans, or a head of state actively urging his supporters to be prepared to take up arms in his defense are things that only happen somewhere else. Never in its history has an incumbent U.S. president who has failed to be re-elected refused to commit to the peaceful transfer of power, or so cavalierly tossed around baseless claims of voter fraud to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the election itself. If this were simply the mad ranting, or tweeting, of the President that would be concerning enough. However, President Trump’s rhetoric is backed up by the refusal of the Republican establishment, including members of Congress, to stand up to him. It appears that those who have the power to check President Trump lack the courage, whereas those who have the courage lack the power.

Even though the Trump era is slated to end on January 20, 2021, with the inauguration of a new President, the U.S. political system will not automatically return to normal with his departure. President Trump may have done more in one single administration to weaken the stability of U.S. institutions and draw into question the U.S. commitment to democracy at home and abroad, but all he has done is accelerate a crisis, and make mainstream, a poisonous way of thinking that was already eating away at U.S. political culture. Thus, as we contemplate both the post-Trump and the post-COVID-19 worlds, not only is the U.S. called to an examination of its political conscience, but the international community is also called to ask what it needs the U.S. of the future to be. Collectively, the people of the world are challenged to ask what is the impact on the stability of their own states and societies if the self-appointed champion of democracy is itself no longer so committed. What happens when the U.S., at least in its commitment to democracy, stops acting like the U.S.?

At the outset, the most pressing question to ask may be, “What is democracy?” Or, better yet, “What makes democracy a better political system than the others?” There is no need to rehash a debate which has been going on since antiquity, or to suggest that there is one definitive answer, but to highlight instead how important it is for the people of an ostensibly democratic republic to ask themselves these questions from time to time. For the people of the U.S., it is not clear that there has been a truly sustained national conversation about the nature of our democracy since the debates over the ratification of the Constitution at the end of the eighteenth century. We are long overdue, considering how much not only the country, but the larger world, has changed in the last two centuries. The answers appropriate for a small, poor, agrarian republic straddling the Atlantic seaboard no longer suit the world’s economic and military hegemon. Inertia alone, or simply saying that this is the way things always have been, is an insufficient basis for maintaining the status quo.

Normative democratic theory explores the moral foundations of democracy and of democratic institutions. Scholars doing work in the field have long recognized the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of this analysis, but theology is almost never mentioned as one of the conversation partners. Instead, it is political science, sociology, or economics that are seen as the disciplines which can inform philosophical reflection. However, as the COVID-19 global pandemic revealed for us yet again, the nature of the crises we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century increasingly have no regard for national borders. Climate change, an increasing scarcity of natural resources, to say nothing of the interconnectedness of the global economy, mean that

the days when we could hermetically seal ourselves off from one another by political frontier have long since passed. World leaders ranging from UN Secretary General António Guterres to the Dalai Lama have noted that the old, pre-pandemic way of doing things is over and that the future calls for greater solidarity. However, the leader who has most consistently called for a radical rethinking of the ethics of the international order, using the language of Catholic social teaching, has been Pope Francis, thus demonstrating the contribution that theological reflection can make as we reevaluate the moral foundations of democracy.

What the Church and the Society of Jesus have to contribute to this conversation is their prophetic voice, because this crisis in U.S. democracy is spiritual as well as political. The remedy is not simply new law or constitutional revision, but a fundamental shift in the political culture itself. Being called to an examination of its political conscience, the U.S. needs to ask itself if it truly values democracy, then what is the moral foundation of that conviction? The stock answer has always been the perceived connection between democracy and the protection of personal liberty and the free market. However, as COVID-19 and climate change have demonstrated in stark relief, the existential threats our societies face are those that we hold in common. Therefore, rethinking the moral foundation of democracy in the U.S., and beyond, requires a reaffirmation of human fraternity. Democracy is a better political system to the extent it encourages and nurtures that fraternity.

While fraternity and social friendship are at the heart of Pope Francis's most recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, this most recent work is informed by his 2015 encyclical on care for our common home *Laudato Si'*. There he developed his vision for an integral ecology, which rests on the fundamental understanding that "everything is closely interrelated" and that "today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis." Although care for creation is its beating heart, integral ecology is not limited to the environment. If everything is truly connected, interrelated in all aspects, then the crises we face are not separate, "one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental." Therefore, at this critical juncture in our history, integral ecology challenges us to rethink the moral paradigm on which democracy rests, moving from one where it is the best protector of individual liberty and free enterprise, towards one where the premise for democracy is that it allows the fullest, freest, integral expression of human dignity.

The Catholic conception of personhood rests on the dignity of the human person who is created in the image and likeness of God. We are radically interconnected to one another, and to God, as a result. I am called to love my neighbor as myself, not because it is the nice thing to do, but because by doing so I praise, worship, and reverence God, whose image I recognize in you. Our interconnectedness calls us, as *Laudato Si'* noted, to authentically open our hearts to universal communion, a sense of fraternity where nothing and no one is excluded. I have to be just as invested in the well-being of your person, your family, your tribe, as I am as my own. A more just political order is that which allows the fullest expression and realization of human dignity. Integral ecology offers a framework for reconceptualizing democracy as that political order.

In the U.S. context this means fostering a political culture that moves away from seeing democracy as a zero-sum game: I win and you lose simply because I have one more vote. According to Israeli philosopher Moshe Halbertal, self-transcendence is at the core of the human capacity for a moral life and is crucial to the viability of a shared politics. U.S. democracy is in crisis, and President Trump was able to challenge the stability of the constitutional order with such impunity, because this quality of self-transcendence is evaporating from the U.S. political system. Institutions suffer not only because the President was consistently able to act and speak without consequences, but because those in his party failed to rise above their interest and voice in public those criticisms they whispered in private. A democratic political order premised on integral ecology calls for a greater regard for the marginalized, a preferential option for the poor, and a regard for my fellow citizens as brothers and sisters, that simply does not exist right now in the U.S.

This failure to love our neighbor as ourselves, or even to see others *as* neighbors, played out in the global arena with President Trump's craven disregard for international institutions ranging from the U.N., NATO, and the World Health Organization. Although the Biden Administration will no doubt recommit the U.S. to multilateralism, there is no guarantee that a future Republican president might not be emboldened to follow up on Trump's xenophobic foreign policy. "America First" and "Make America Great Again" did not emerge out of thin air and both speak to that same unwillingness to transcend self that infects U.S. domestic politics.

Reimagining U.S. democracy premised on integral ecology would also have a profound, stabilizing effect on how the U.S. views its international commitments because the same self-transcendence and investment in the well-being and dignity of others which fosters a healthy democracy at home can play out on the global stage. This is important because while U.S. xenophobia and isolationism may echoes of policy from the 1930s, the past offers us little guide. The U.S. of then and now are completely different, particularly in terms of the economic muscle that the U.S. of the 21<sup>st</sup> century wields is unprecedented in history. The impunity with which the U.S. imposes unilateral economic sanctions on not only foreign states, but individuals as well, largely flies under the domestic radar, but affects the global economy in a myriad of ways. Coming to see the exercise of their economic power and influence through an integral ecology lens could lead to greater transparency and discernment into who, what, and why the U.S. chooses to sanction.

One unmistakable message that I have heard in my time here in Kenya, which does not make it home loudly enough, is that the world is watching and taking note of what the U.S. does, and does not, do in these days. Both Africa and the wider international community need the United States to *be* the United States, at least the version of the U.S. that has a clear human rights agenda, that supports free and transparent elections, and that holds other states to account for how they treat their citizens and neighbors. For example, the message that the world's despots hear when the U.S. fails to stand up to the Russians as they poison dissidents, or the Saudis as they murder journalists within the walls of their consulate, is that they can harass their own populations with impunity without fear of attracting Washington's

attention, let alone ire. A U.S. where the President refuses to accept the results of a transparent, free election has no moral authority to criticize any other world leader that does the same.

A world where the U.S. has abdicated its self-appointed role as the champion of democracy and rule of law is one that is much less stable, and potentially more dangerous, than people might have anticipated. The international community may have found the U.S. somewhat sanctimonious, if not hypocritical, in what it chose in the past to direct its attention towards, but for almost eighty years it could be consistently counted on to be the moral voice which equated freedom with democracy. Growing U.S. indifference, coupled with the deterioration of its own democracy, leaves a dangerous moral vacuum at the center of the international order.

None of this was rendered moot by Donald Trump's defeat at the polls. The fact remains that over 72 million Americans took a look at Trump's record and said they were willing to give him four more years in power, despite his cavalier attitude towards U.S. institutions and the rule of law. In fact, our job may be even harder as we are trying, as a people, to rebuild our democracy and reconcile ourselves to one another at the same time. The crisis in U.S. democracy is spiritual, as well as political. If anything, the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of the need for solidarity in the face of all those problems which affect us as a human family. We are all interconnected, no matter how difficult that seems to believe. We, the Church and the Society of Jesus, are in a privileged position to foster new moral discourse in the public sphere. It is critical in the post-pandemic world, where we are challenged by this frontal assault on democracy, that theology, specifically Catholic social teaching, enter the conversation. *Laudato Si'* lays the foundation for us, *Fratelli Tutti* lights the path ahead – we are challenged to assume the mantle and jump boldly into the fray.

*Original in English*



## Sketch of a Xenopolitics for *Exsul familia*: Thinking of the Frontiers of Vagrancy and Today's Exiles?

**Mouloud Idir**

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*"The U.S-Mexican border is an open wound where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds. And before a scab forms it haemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants."*

- **Gloria E. Anzaldúa**, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

There is today no lack of subjects connected with the question of migration – we prefer this term to that of the phrase 'migratory phenomenon', which reveals the extent of our collective inadequacy in responding to the current challenges posed by peoples' need for protection or quite simply the challenge of a more egalitarian access to the important question of freedom of movement. All of us, men and women alike, have in mind restrictions at borders (Lesbos, Calais, Vallée de la Roya, Roxham) and the various interception mechanisms in the countries of departure or of transit, the lifting of moratoriums (TPS) [Temporary Protected Status] regarding the deportation of people whose status is irregular, or quite simply the tightening up of measures for gaining access to visas.

The phenomenon of the movement of peoples, forced displacement and, more broadly, contemporary exile are signs of the times calling for a transfiguration and the prelude of a political revolution which appears inevitable and in part prophetic. We must seize the opportunity and the current symptomatic dimensions of the issue to bring out a democratic inventiveness, to surmount walls and build bridges by thought and as far as possible by action, and we must do this by making frontiers into meeting places. This could enable us to get beyond selfishness that is buttressed by state sovereignties.

Hence a number of questions may legitimately be asked. What is the use of proclaiming (in all senses of the word) rights by supposedly universal declarations or by international treaties if the principle of state and territorial sovereignty ultimately operates as a selective and arbitrary filter to the implementation of these rights and if the states called democratic refuse

to give life to them or to incorporate them in the integral principles that they announce? The answers to questions of this kind are not comfortable but they oblige us to think of the crucial questions concerning these challenges.

Nevertheless it would be better to remind states of their responsibilities regarding this issue and to plead for a welcome which integrates the duty of hospitality as a political horizon, a human ethic and a spiritual imperative. Persons exiled in situations of extreme precariousness or lack of rights should be able to enjoy inalienable rights that take precedence over national laws or state regulations. These human beings beset by vagrancy and the men and women who come to their help, as the philosopher Étienne Balibar frequently recalls, should be able to rely on the law in their efforts to resist this process. It is a matter, he says, of knowing whether states expel these people from their midst or whether they integrate them into their political order and their system of values. The question that we wish to pose in this text is that of knowing what remains of a democratic society when its state, supposed to embody its public power, treats these women and men who knock at its doors or pass through it as if, in its eyes, they had no right to have rights. In a way, asking this question is a manner of echoing the spirit of *Exsul Familia* (Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia, de Spirituali Emigrantium Cura*, 1 August 1952).

In short, if we believe in the universality of human rights, it is hard for us to accept that such basic rights as the freedom of movement, the right to earn one's living or merely to live with those one loves should be reserved for the inhabitants of rich countries; that those men and women most in need of it should be denied the right to flee persecution or injustice; that hundreds of thousands, indeed millions of people in a situation of vagrancy should be put at risk and denied the right to life and liberty. People whose only crime is to have wanted to cross a forbidden frontier in order to escape destitution or threats. For too many sacred lives belonging to the Holy Family are forced to flee and have no access to these fundamental rights or to the possibility of referring to them in order to give them a new content.

We are here going to try here to advance the terms of this discussion by proposing the elements of three types of approach, as follows:

- A political reflection on the constitutive and founding potential of the legal principle of having rights to counter indifference and the lack of dignity;
- A position that places the primacy of human dignity above the jurisdiction of the state;
- Lastly, we shall sketch the terms of an active rather than merely passive and statutory idea of citizenship.

### **A right to rights as a right to politics: the sense of hospitality**

Globally, an analysis of the current context shows that repression and a toughening stance strongly imbue the measures concerning people who do not fit into the very highly selective choices of states. These people in distressing circumstances are all too often seen and perceived as being 'superfluous and useless', according to the utilitarian logic that prevails in our capitalist societies. What is involved here is the right to move, which thus becomes unequally distributed between people who are well-off and people who are not.

Moreover, where the law is limited or cannot serve a priori as a lever, it is important to go back to the principle defined in her time by Hannah Arendt by the expression of 'the right to have rights'. To sum up, those men and women who have nothing cannot remain in destitution which exposes them to permanent danger and to a lack of dignity. In expressing their unacceptable situation and in mobilising themselves to put an end to the extreme violence that characterizes their life or circumstances, these people exercise their 'right to politics' or, to put it differently, base their legitimacy in participation and a place in the common world.

There is a significant portion of society in favour of civility and against violence, which thus finds itself instigated by the mobilization of the exiled and of organisations which go to their aid or offer them help. In this sense, we are to a certain extent indebted to the struggles of these people. They show us how to resist courageously this vicious circle of the violence of capitalist globalization by re-establishing the truth about the history and condition of many human beings, considered as superfluous and reduced to the ranks of the disposable or at the very most to accounting data.

The idea of the right to rights which we put first here in this sense involves a scope that we might call constitutive (or foundational) which is inseparable from the original and continuously perfectible principle of democracy and citizenship. We must not lose sight of the fact that democracy is not constructed as the attribution of a status and a distribution of rights by a superior authority, but only by egalitarian participation and the direct intervention of the people (in the sense of equals), in common life.

Citizenship, as Étienne Balibar tells us, cannot and must not disregard a reference to the collective and egalitarian creation of the public space, for it is from this that citizenship as an activity perpetually redraws the contours of citizenship as a status. The mobilization of these people and the organisations which come to their help thus renew our practices of the *political routine*, while not losing sight of the fact that the people concerned very frequently submit their survival and their concerns to mediation and negotiation, more often than not without being forced to do so.

Let us bear in mind that there is no politics except that ordained at the establishment of a common world, which can only be deployed if the divisions of life in society do not deteriorate into separations, or conflicts into destructive wars. And it is the political genius of hospitality to contribute to prevention as regards the risk of this degradation. Those in search of shelter and a welcome in short, the exiled, are, as Étienne Tassin says, those who cross borders. They knock at the door in order to belong to the common world (common House) and to assert their right to be there.

They are therefore by definition men and women to whom hospitality is owed so that a politics, which Tassin calls 'xenopolitics' may be established with them or rather: thanks to them. Ultimately this xenopolitics is merely another other name for a world policy (*Global compact on migrations*), a cosmopolitics such as the present situation requires. For the politics of the relations of peoples, as well as those of states with one another, depends on the hospitality granted to the exiled. It is the principle of hospitality among other things that can

enable an emergence from the logics of hostility and enmity, to use the words of Achille Mbembe. The fact of refusing it leads to addressing the issue of migration in the register of war *declared* and of friend-enemy modalities. In short, it is a refusal to let oneself be transfigured. This hostile propensity constitutes a rejection of the policy, even a denunciation of it.

We must, it seems to us, see in the figures of the exiled and those in circumstances of vagrancy human beings who call for the highest degree of hospitality and who contribute to a politics of civility. For otherwise it is the logic of policing which will carry the day with its fair share of violations. In this regard the destruction of shelters and refuges for those without documents and the criminalization (*crime of solidarity*) of the Good Samaritans of present times who offer them help and assistance is in itself a renunciation of politics. The snag is that even if they describe the repressive and criminal measures that they put forward as 'politics', many people will have recognized in this denial of hospitality the repudiation of politics that is imposed by the subordination of states to purely selfish calculations and the police management of populations.

### **A migration policy: the human being before the State**

The late philosopher Étienne Tassin, whom we have just mentioned, has bequeathed to us a rich reflection on what he describes as a *migration policy*. In his view, addressing the migration question in a political perspective requires us to think that a common future with the man or woman with whom we have nothing in common save the fact of being human and equal in dignity is possible. It is, he liked to recall, the institution of a link which forestalls war and establishes the conditions for peace. This opens on what he calls a xenopolitics which makes possible the building of a world common to those men and women who have no share in it other than what they grant each other for their common interest. In this Tassin sees the condition and end of all politics. If this xenopolitics is its *condition*, this is because it makes possible, from its own perspective, the inauguration of a link with the stranger to be instituted. Indeed, every politics is a relationship with the other, the construction of a common world with him or her. It calls on us to aim to see our fellow humans as a horizon in order to live in a common house with them. For in Tassin's view the need to take on the question of the foreigner politically is a highly pertinent criterion by virtue of which we can appreciate the political dignity of the public power.

Such a *migration politics* moreover requires us to focus on other questions: such as thinking differently of the relations between a political community and citizenship. The jurist Monique Chemillier-Gendreau constantly reminds us that we need something like a reversal of perspective: fundamental rights must not be given to us, but we must take them because we are human beings. They must not come to us from a state authority. This perspective has the great merit of obliging us to think of the human community in universal terms, that is, with rights from which no human being would be excluded.

The question of sovereignty is raised here because the current interstate logic refuses to take into account at the juridical level the universalist dimension of humanity, as well as the imperative need to globalize certain rights and certain areas of law. Above all it makes us

realize that reflection on the foundations of human rights has become congealed in the state mould. For Monique Chemillier-Gendreau it is imperative not to avoid the question of the law's foundations. For it is this that enables us not to lose sight of a fundamental principle, namely that the human being exists before the state. When we say 'before', we are not referring to a historical precedence but to an ontological approach. The human being comes first. The question of his or her rights is therefore asked *per se*. The question of men's and women's individual freedom, always in connection with collective liberty, must be politically considered and regulated. And this must be so whatever may be the forms of collective organisations to be invented or transformed. However this need for institutional transformation calls for a conception of political action and of the action which demands of us that we do not postulate its form or purpose in advance or speculatively. This leaves room for the indeterminate and the unprecedented but also for hope and contingencies. For history with all its problems, for saying things differently.

This migration policy is part of a deeper reflection on the condition of exiles and on what the reality of migration indicates. The condition of these people, Tassin tells us, is that of every human being who lives his or her life to the full, on the frontier (to use an Ignatian formula), on this reversible edge which makes of every human being a guest in a double sense. Hospitality is its principle: a political principle since it comes to convert the potential hostility of the foreigner and towards the foreigner into political equality for the common world. It is in this manner that the human and social aspects of any life, which is always in its own way an exile according to the movement of human existence – a problematic life – are held in common.

### **Active citizenship and the democratization of frontiers**

This attention brought to a political and democratic analysis of the migratory event is in our opinion included in a vision of a citizenship that is active rather than merely statutory. It makes it possible to take into account the issue of exclusion in political analysis of the migratory event: namely to pay attention to the men and women the denial of whose rights thereby, for this very reason, deprives them of the material conditions of life and of the forms of recognition which constitute the dignity of being human. This is not only a theoretical criterion serving to measure the degree of closeness of historical models of citizenship in relation to their ideal form: it is a way of facing the reality of extreme violence in the history of contemporary societies, at the heart of their everyday life.

This deconstruction of the juridical conception of citizenship by the practice of citizenship seems to us to be fundamental if we are to think of the issue of migration in a more democratic and egalitarian perspective. In this sense, as Martin Deleixhe reminds us by extending the reflections of the philosopher Étienne Balibar, the measures for the closing of frontiers and the ways in which we generally think of them fail to let us get the measure of the ambivalent and excessively inegalitarian dimension of the institution of frontiers itself. To understand this better, they call for an effort in order for us to grasp how the frontier reached the point of forcing a truncated interpretation of citizenship, which leads to a distortion of its meaning. For, schematically, citizenship refers to two situations, distinct despite being intrinsically linked. On the one hand citizenship can be a legal status. It then defines the situation of a

person who is included in the political community, or in other words of a man or woman who is formally authorised to take part in the political life of the community. On the other hand citizenship is a political activity: it is the production through both individual and collective engagement, including by militant advocacy and hospital care, of a form of 'sharing' in human life, in other words a public space for egalitarian discussion.

Such a viewpoint is inspired by Hannah Arendt's formula, '*the right to have rights*'. What the 1930s taught us is that the fundamental rights, let us call them human rights, were themselves in need of being protected and that this protection could only come from a community created by the practice of the citizen's rights lived as an unconditional political engagement not reducible to a status. In this framework citizenship does not belong to anyone as a right, since it is only the fruit of a desire and of creative participation. In this perspective the right to participate in the elaboration of the norms of common life is based on the fact of politically seizing one's destiny for oneself and of refusing an unacceptable situation. It is not handed out by a dominating and sovereign political entity.

In other words, such a perspective of citizenship and of inclusion in the political body expresses a social bond and prefigures a political framework in which the rights and freedoms recognized as belonging to individuals and the obligations which are their counterpart, however limited they may be, do not emanate from a transcendent power but more fundamentally from the 'agreement' of citizens. It is the characteristic of militant work, of advocacy, and of the refusal to restrict people to the sole category of needing humanitarian assistance to redefine the terms of the *agreement* that can permit entry and inclusion in the same political community.

What we must from now on take as a consequence, and which would be in symbiosis with the work of the Jesuit networks on the frontiers, is from our humble point of view what follows: we can at the very least advocate that the over-coercive and arbitrary dimension that presides over the practices of border controls be justified to the people over whom the rules are exercised (especially the most vulnerable of them) by the setting up of mechanisms which submit the rules to the democratic principle and to deliberation, to discernment as it were.

In principle these mechanisms should normally regroup both citizens and individuals wishing to migrate or the formal representatives of migrant people, even state diplomats, organisations of civil society (including faith communities) and organisations for the defence of rights, etc. Of course, the question of the appropriate representation of people subjected to coercion at frontiers is far from easy and finds no definitive answer from the specialists. Nevertheless one thing is clear. The rules for crossing frontiers and their justification cannot, for the sake of fidelity to the democratic principle, avoid *effective* participation in the democratic deliberations of people subjected to the harshness of their operating rules. Henceforth we can say that this request for a democratization of frontiers is not devoid of important political and practical effects.

The lesson we may draw from this calls for an observation: namely that the frontier system, as Étienne Balibar tells us, remains radically anti-democratic as long as it is purely discretionary, that no possibility exists for the 'users' of frontiers individually and collectively

to negotiate either the manner of administration or the rules concerning border crossing. This is what we might call a plea for the democratization of frontiers, to be distinguished from an appeal that aims at their abolition. But the democratic import of this plea is politically intensified here.

The fact of dwelling on the rules concerning the crossing of borders is of a political rather than a technical or merely administrative kind (the state's customary practice), more fundamentally because it has to do with our way of conceiving democracy. This conception is ambivalent and may appear contradictory, for this plea for the democratization of frontiers is part of a tightening of the control that it takes as a target: for to the control of frontiers and hence of the movement of populations by the state, it adds a control of the state by the people and social groups. Thus it brings the frontier issue out of the framework of the state and into that of politics and a discussion of what is just and unjust. In contesting *sovereign* law in the name of the democratic principle, we show the political and incremental character of rights and advance the building of democracy, while underlining its incomplete and endlessly perfectible character.

Original *French*  
*Translation* Catherine Marceline Rice



## Is Hope Still Possible?

**Jorge Cela Carvajal, SJ**

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For work reasons I have spent 11 of the last 20 years traveling throughout Latin America. I have lived stably (for longer than one consecutive year) in four Latin American countries: The Dominican Republic, Brazil, Peru and Cuba. This experience does not give me nearly enough knowledge, much less understanding, of the various political systems to allow me to comprehend the crisis of democracy in the region. But it does give me certain insights that I want to share.

The political systems that I have experienced, be they representative democracies marked by capitalist populism or Caribbean socialism, have deteriorated due to the influence of multiple factors, but I will focus on three: the demonization or deification of the market, the exclusive exercise of power and the steady erosion of the common good. Faced with this situation, is it still possible to hope of living in real and full democracy?

### **The Demonization or Deification of the Market**

As a result of the long running cold war, the world was divided into capitalist and socialist systems. Thus we can group the United States and Haiti among the former and China and Cuba among the latter. The usefulness of this classification is increasingly being called into question, as it groups together countries with very dissimilar systems. However, in the Latin American context, the attitude towards the market continues to be a differentiating factor. While some tend more and more to deify it, others demonize it.

Representative democracies exist in capitalist systems where the deification of the market positions it as a macro system that encompasses everything, including the state. The latter becomes an object of the market that falls within the laws of supply and demand. Access to government can be bought, which is the key to managing state power. The privatisation of the state has thus come to pass.

A few decades ago, the Dominican Republic fought over whether or not to privatise state assets, such as the companies of the late dictator Trujillo, which had been nationalised. Today what is at stake is the privatization of the state itself.

Political parties increasingly represent fewer ideological perspectives on society and are more similar to companies, which one enters into for economic interests (much like investing or working in a private company). They invest in achieving governmental power, in order to

manage the state in such a way that the investments are recuperated and a profit is produced. From political leaders, who invest their own assets and receive others' for their campaigns, in exchange for commitments on positions or perks; to the simple voter, who sells their vote to cover the bare necessities, or votes for the person who will hand out the most, rather than the person one who will best administer the state's assets, in this way opening the door to populist propositions.

For this reason, programs matter less and less in electoral campaigns; what matters more are promises of individual economic advantages and how they will be distributed.

The so-called neoliberal tendencies deified the market to such an extent that they would propose that the state was becoming increasingly useless, to the point of it being a hindrance, due to the market's capacity for self-regulation. The state had to shrink so that the market could function without obstacles.

But the regulatory capacity of the market fails to guarantee the equitable distribution of goods. On the contrary, the gap between rich and poor has increased. In Latin America, this is evident: it has the distinction of being the most unequal continent in terms of distribution of wealth.

Hence, the socialist proposal, which demonizes the market, is appealing to the popular masses. In practice, socialism creates an absolute monopoly of the market, eliminating competition, which supposedly causes inequality. But eliminating private interest in the market leads to a lackluster attitude towards production. Cuban productivity has been affected to such an extent that Cuba must import 80% of what it eats, and this is not primarily due to the effect of the North American embargo. The centralized economy and state capitalism have plunged Cuba into a permanent economic crisis in which it has only been able to survive thanks to foreign aid from Russia and Venezuela, money sent back by emigrants in capitalist countries, and tourism, which curiously is managed by large capitalist multinationals allied to the state. The other significant intake has been the sale of services of Cuban professionals by the socialist state, acting as a large brokerage firm for poorly paid 'human capital'.

The crisis has deteriorated and endangered the two great achievements of the Cuban revolution, financed with the help of the Soviet Union: health and education. Low productivity causes a lack of resources to invest in social services.

Both the deification and the demonization of the market have produced a weakening of democracy, that is, of the capacity of the majority to influence state decisions and to benefit from the nation's assets.

In this process of privatization of the state, the role played by the media has been very important. Money is spent on advertising, in the same manner as soft-drink or toothpaste manufacturers. And whoever invests more and better, sells more. Political campaigns are the number one clients of advertising companies in populist capitalist democracies, while the control of the media is an important weapon in socialist societies. For this reason, the new Cuban constitution continues to guarantee state ownership of the media.

The technological revolution is beginning to undermine capitalist or state media control and to force a restructuring of media management. Two examples give plenty of proof to this fact: President Trump's handling of twitter and the growing importance of fake news in political campaigns.

Curiously, these two opposing stances in relation to the market have similar effects on consumption: it becomes the centre of life. In capitalist countries, consumerism is unleashed with terrible social and ecological impacts, and in socialism, fears around consumption are exacerbated in a context of scarcity. During the so-called Special Period (after the fall of the Soviet bloc) any conversation between Cubans within 10 minutes would already have moved on to food. It was a daily obsession. This phenomenon is beginning to reproduce itself in the current situation.

### **The Exclusionary Exercise of Power**

One of the most obvious characteristics of the deterioration of representative democracies is the exercise of power as an exclusionary force. This is in keeping with an economic system based on competition. Access to power is seen as an opportunity to exclude others from participation. In capitalist democracies this is evident when a change of government personnel occurs after a new party wins an election. In Cuban socialism it is the manner in which the single party oversees all life in the nation.

The winner, either of the elections or the war, has the right to dominate by fair means or foul and the loser is excluded until their turn comes. This has been the case in the *caudillo* or strongman type leaderships in Latin American dictatorships or weak democracies. In the name of the good of the people, those who think differently are imprisoned or forced into exile. This is the absolute denial of diversity as part of the make-up of society.

Today, when modernity already has deep roots in Latin American societies, a homogenous general population is no longer possible. The diverse nature of civil society is expressed in the variety of movements that reflect multiple identities: regional, gender, labour, generational, religious or racial.

Political regimes have had to accept various forms of negotiation. Sometimes they have tried to incorporate this diversity into the state apparatus by creating a "state civil society", if we are to give a name to this contradiction. Other times, regimes have accepted the presence of these movements while seeking to limit their scope of action, thus giving rise to civil society's continuous struggle to expand the frontiers of what is permitted.

This exclusionary conception of power strengthens the self-perpetuating desires of power holders. Given that you can either have all the power, or you can have none, the urge is to keep it in your own hands. The idea of parliamentary democracies is precisely the opposite. Parliaments are the expression of shared power, in which negotiation is necessary. Latin American democracies are generally presidential, centred on the President. But the existence of parliaments, where there is a plurality of parties, means negotiation is unavoidable. As parties become more like companies, the people are seen as customers. The important thing is to convince them why they should buy, or why they should vote. Their participation is

limited to their moment at the ballot box. Each time those elected feel less like representatives of the people. At most they consider themselves representatives of the party. In the case of the single party system, the party is the point of reference, the sole overseer of the life of the nation, which supposedly represents the will of the people, but when it does not, it suffers no consequences.

This exclusionary power gives rise to power struggles, competitive in nature and similar to situations where the market is seen as the organizer of life, in which politics adopts a warlike character aimed at defeating the enemy. Social life becomes a struggle for power, where in the long run anything goes, because war is war. Someone said that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This exclusionary power is a breeding ground for repressive regimes, corruption and impunity.

We could say that during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the motto of the French Revolution divided the world between those who sought freedom (the market) even at the cost of equality (democracy) and those who sought equality even at the cost of freedom. Fraternity was the great forgotten term. Perhaps if the latter had been the central principle, then equality could have been combined with freedom. Only by acknowledging others as brothers and sisters, with their rights fully recognized, can a freedom that seeks equality come into being.

### **The Renunciation of the Common Good**

Part of the legacy of modernity is the comprehension of humans as individuals. In this conceptualisation, an awareness of the relationships one has with others and with nature is not necessarily part of affirmation of the self. In a context shaped by market competition and the struggle for power, the other is configured as a competitor, as the enemy. The pursuit of wellbeing is conceptualized as a battlefield. Wellbeing comes by way of accumulation, which is the result of success in competition, thereby excluding others. Social relations are defined by conquest and defence, which are carried out by a well-defined in-group.

All that is public, common, and belongs to everyone, is perceived as taking away from what is ours, what is private. We lay claim to the part of the public space that belongs to us as members of the collective. All that is common feels alien to us if we cannot appropriate it. We fight to conquer and preserve our private space, even when it has been expropriated from the public.

The market is not designed to facilitate the survival of all, but to create opportunities for the winners. Politics is not the search for the common good, rather the space to accumulate private assets. Citizens are replaced by masses demanding their own individual rights. In the extreme this means demanding the right to use public space without respect for others, ignoring the rules of coexistence. People demand the right not to wear a mask in their own part of the common space, even if it affects the right to health of others. Public space is no longer shared between everyone, rather each person sees it as their own.

In the socialist world, where theoretically the individual is subordinated to the collective and where the public good tries to make the private unnecessary, scarcity provokes the pursuit of the private as a survival mechanism. Examples of this are the current queues to buy food or

toiletries. Shortages mean people must wait in massive queues to be assured of their own rations. Given the threat of infection from the pandemic in the queues, many people prefer to pay a premium to those who stand in the queue for the relevant products. This provokes a more severe clamp down on *coleros*<sup>1</sup>, which in turn results in an increase in black market prices, due to the increased risks involved. Those who have resources tend to stockpile, for fear of shortages. Thus scarcity increases and the vicious circle of inequality increases.

Our societies, disillusioned by our political history, have come to the intuition that the solution lies elsewhere, that it is necessary to look for alternatives to the system. Thus the informal world comes into being, churning just below the surface, which we pretend not to see, but it shocks us by its efficiency and cruelty in causing many to suffer horrific conditions for survival.

And we do not ask the question: if our systems have failed, where do we turn?

### **The Glimmering Seed of Hope**

In the Caribbean we are in cyclone season. The devastating passing of a hurricane is capable of uprooting century-old trees. Some, lying on the ground after the awesome phenomenon, retain small root hairs still buried in the ground. Fifteen days later, upon visiting the sad spectacle of razed earth, we discovered that small green leaves had appeared on these delicate roots. This is the indestructible energy of life sprouting. This is the hope that grows feebly in the desert. In those fragile green leaves lies the future.

Thus, democracy is being born in small communities that have confronted the storms of crisis with creative solidarity. These are groups, families, organizations, churches and movements that have not been led astray by the seductive but deceptive offers disseminated by the propaganda machine, nor by the fear of ruthless repression, nor by the lies repeated ad nauseam. As long as this truly inclusive fraternity infused with solidarity, which is passed down from parent to child, continues to exist and manages to find a way forward, even a tentative one; there is still hope. Because democracy is built from below. It creates spaces of a fraternity that understands how to integrate freedom and equality. And while it has not yet managed to grow as a system of social coexistence, it opens spaces of hope and uncovers pathways to follow.

A democratic culture must be created that develops the capacities for creative entrepreneurship, participation and solidarity, emanating not only from discourse, but from structures of coexistence and governance in the home, school, civil society, the market and government.

I think that the new communication technologies, which teach us to build knowledge not from repetition and accumulation, but from creativity and connectivity, will help in this endeavour to construct the future of democracy.

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<sup>1</sup>Name given to those who queue to buy products to resell at higher prices.

A necessary component is the existence of legislation to promote initiatives of creativity and solidarity in the market, to guarantee authentic participation in complex societies and to develop mechanisms of social inclusion for all. A market oriented towards a democratic society, and a power structure organized through participation guided by solidarity, will help promote the common good as a way to achieve the good life. The challenge is to build social systems that promote this.

Pope Francis, through his charismatic leadership, has promoted an economy of solidarity that starts with understanding the world as our common home. He has implemented new ways of organizing power in the Church through synodality - which opens participation to the geographic, economic and existential peripheries - and de-clericalisation, all of which functions to eliminate the abuse of power.

It is not a one-day task. But, as Pope Francis has said, it cannot be established by force - through taking control of spaces - only by setting processes in motion. This is everyone's job.

*Original Spanish*  
*Translation Nils Sundermann*



## **We Didn't Know, We Couldn't, We Didn't Want to: The Chilean Institutional Deficit and Some Deliberative Ideas for the New Constitution**

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Until October 2019, Chile was one of the most highly regarded countries in Latin America. The political stability and economic prosperity displayed in recent years was enough for the country to be considered exemplary on the continent. However, since the 18th of this month, events have challenged this status. In the midst of massive citizen protests, aggressively repressed by the state, it was plain to see discontent with the prevailing system and the clear need to discuss a new economic model and the constitution that underpins it.

Without delving into the specific demands that are driving citizen protest - which undoubtedly are serious and in many cases urgent - in this article I would like to reflect on the institutional problems that prevented a timely and satisfactory response. In addition, I want to propose some ideas on how deliberative theory can help remedy these institutional deficits, thereby making democratic vitality a more likely prospect.

To explain the above, I will argue that when faced with the question, "why did the social conflict escalate to this point?" the Chilean political class only has three responses. The first, frequently lent upon by the government, is "we didn't know." This means that the institutions did not ensure that the representatives were aware of the unrest that was brewing. The second plea, uttered by those who defend constitutional change, is "we couldn't". This is to say that, even when attempts were made to undo the causes of dissatisfaction, they proved unsuccessful within the current institutional structure. The last response is "we didn't want to". This response means that, despite being aware of the unrest that was brewing and having the means to solve it, the democratic institutions were not able to drive through change in the face of those who opposed it. As will be demonstrated, this is the chosen response of those who are against adopting a new constitution.

Before delving into the foregoing, I want to make some points about the perspective being adopted here. The first is about social movements (SM). The current boom and diversity in SM, not just in Chile, but throughout the region, demonstrates the serious shortcomings of

institutions to politically mediate social demands. Given this, I argue that deliberative theory<sup>1</sup> allows us to conceive of a democracy which views SM as relevant political actors and not merely an expression of discontent.<sup>2</sup> Thus, SM should be actively included in the deliberation on their demands and be jointly responsible for the agreements adopted to resolve them.

The other point is about democracy. One of the reasons for the exclusion of SM from political deliberation is that the institutions of modern democracy were designed for a society that no longer exists.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the first constitutionalists were faced with societies made up of people with relatively homogeneous or homogenizable priorities. The competing interests could be defined as business owners or workers, men or women, rural or urban, etc. This plays out similarly with political parties, although in a less caste-like manner. In parties, the belief lingers on that individuals' priorities can be expressed by homogeneous projects.

However, what we see today, largely thanks to SM themselves, are complex societies, that is, societies made up of individuals who claim to adhere to various identities and affiliations, even ones contradictory to each other.<sup>4</sup> For example, a person can simultaneously identify as Catholic, support same-sex marriage, be an environmentalist and advocate for the free market. In the current democratic model, it is possible to be an activist in each of these causes, but unlikely to be politically represented in the party system. It is precisely for this reason that new democracies must give space for the diversity of social demands to be acknowledged and addressed by politics. This essay seeks to be a contribution in this direction.

### **We didn't know**

A significant part of the Chilean political class has insisted that the social upheaval in October was unforeseeable.<sup>5</sup> They justify this statement by saying that democratic institutions were functioning correctly. Indeed, the President of the Republic had been elected two years previously and the electoral majority gave him their support in full knowledge of what to expect, given that it was for his second term. Along with this, his coalition had significant support in Congress.

Thus, the protests were described as the expression of dissatisfied minorities or “sore losers”, who were trying to destabilize a democratically elected government. It was even said that foreign elements were participating, whose agenda was to destroy the political and economic model that had guaranteed the pathway to development. Consequently, it was the

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent summary of the proposals of deliberative democracy can be found in Martí, José Luis. (2006). “La República Deliberativa. Una teoría sobre democracia”. Madrid: Marcial Pons.

<sup>2</sup> On the development of the political evolution of social movements see Salazar, Gabriel. (2012). “Los Movimientos Sociales en Chile. Trayectoria histórica y proyección política”. Santiago: Uqbar Editores.

<sup>3</sup> Gargarella, Roberto. (1999). *Introducción*. In Gargarella, Roberto (Comp.) “Derecho y Grupos desaventajados”. Barcelona: Gedisa Editorial.

<sup>4</sup> This idea and a similar example can be found in Sen, Amartya. (2007). “Identidad y Violencia, la ilusión de un destino”. Buenos Aires: Katz Editores.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase “we didn't see it coming” became almost commonplace. President Piñera said it for the first time in an interview with a Spanish radio station. See

<https://www.latercera.com/politica/noticia/pinera-confiesa-no-vio-venir-estallido-social-acusa-ola-violencia-sistemica-profesional-organizada/935757/>

government's responsibility to restore order by deploying the forces of the state. President Piñera's statement on the night of October 21st became famous, when, surrounded by the military, he declared a constitutional state of emergency because Chile was facing a "powerful and implacable enemy"<sup>6</sup>.

However, it would be undoubtedly wrong to assert, based on the surprise declaration in the midst of the unfolding events and the consequent criminalization of civil unrest, that no one had noticed that Chilean democracy was deteriorating and was heading towards a crisis. The truth is that, for at least the last twenty years, a possible collapse of the Chilean political system has been discussed. For example, this was indicated by UNDP in reports from 1998 onwards<sup>7</sup>; in 2012 by Gabriel Salazar, the National History Award winner; and in 2013 by the influential constitutionalist and academic Fernando Atria<sup>8</sup>.

In reality, two pieces of information heralded the crisis that was brewing: low electoral turnouts and the progressive increase in SM. This reflected that people had serious political concerns but their way of expressing them was through non-institutional collective action. By way of example, it bears mentioning the Mapuche people's ancestral movement, whose flags became a symbol of the October uprising; the student movement, active since 2003; the movement for pensions "with dignity" NO+AFP; and the 8M feminist movement. At the local level there were uprisings in cities such as Freirina, Aysen, Petorca, Puchuncaví, Quinteros, among others.<sup>9</sup>

Irrelevant of whether this appeal of ignorance is authentic or cynical, the very fact that the institutional design permits a political authority to make this plea is a serious problem for democracy. It means that the institutional design allows representatives to ignore the reality of the people they represent, to such an extent that it only comes to their attention when a political crisis of this proportion occurs. To contend with this, deliberative theory offers some ideas to ensure that the voice of those being represented is listened to and seriously taken into account.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.t13.cl/noticia/politica/nacional/pinera-respalda-ff.aa-y-asegura-estamos-guerra-enemigo-poderoso-e-implacable>.

<sup>7</sup> This report collects and supports with data the idea of 'Democracy today as an iron cage' formulated the previous year by the sociologist Tomás Moulián in Moulián, Tomás. (1997). "Chile Actual". Anatomía de un mito. LOM-ARCIS, Santiago.

<sup>8</sup> His phrase "the constitutional problem will have to be resolved by hook or by crook" ("el problema constitucional tendrá que resolverse por las buenas o por las malas") was made famous. <https://www.elmostrador.cl/noticias/pais/2013/04/23/el-problema-constitucional-tendra-que-resolverse-por-las-buenas-o-por-las-malas/>. For the social and structural reasons for the above, see, for example, his works: "La Constitución Tramposa" LOM, 2011; ATRIA, Fernando. (2013) "Veinte Años Después. Neoliberalismo con rostro humano". Catalonia. A work dated after this statement, but alluding to the same phenomenon, authored alongside Salgado, Constanza and Wilenmann, Javier. "Democracia y Neutralización. Origen, desarrollo y solución de la crisis constitucional" LOM, 2017

<sup>9</sup> After October 18th, a Coordinator of Territorial Assemblies was formed to include Neighborhood Councils, social organizations, and self-convened assemblies among other collectives. See <http://www.asambleasterritoriales.org>

Deliberative democracy is rooted on the assumption that decisions adopted by political powers are legitimate if, and only if, those who must abide by them are included in the deliberation. "Legitimate" here means that the decisions make their own case for being obeyed, even by those who do not endorse their contents. Or, likewise, that they make it unnecessary for the forces of the state to be employed to impose them.

The requirement for participation in deliberation, in turn, means two things. On the one hand, it guarantees that diverse points of view will be considered in the relevant public discussion. On the other hand, it ensures that people can be active in proposing the matters up for deliberation. The reason for this is that a crucial element of real political power is the power to determine what is up for discussion.

Thus, deliberative theories examine mechanisms that permit a given SM's demand - typically related to a particular sector - to progress to the stage of political deliberation, where it is transformed "into" and is discussed "as", a matter that affects the common good. There are diverse mechanisms that exist and each has produced different results. At least two examples bear mentioning: popular legislative initiatives<sup>10</sup> and citizen-initiated referenda. In the first, a certain percentage or number of voters call on the parliament to examine a particular law. In the second, a certain percentage or number of voters call the rest of the citizenry to issue a declaration on whether or not it is necessary to legislate on a particular issue. Now, regardless of the institutional form adopted, the guiding principle should be the recognition of the ability of SM to activate deliberation. As the Chilean case shows, the democratic solution was to hold a referendum on a new constitution. That is, to deliberatively mediate the demands expressed by SM.

It should also be noted that deliberative mechanisms allow a counterbalance to the homogenizing force of political parties. Given that parties don't take ownership over the advancement of particular causes, each individual can have the full diversity of their affiliations expressed more clearly. In this same sense, the vote is reappraised, since people are not tied to the "all or nothing" of one particular candidate or political project, rather they retain the substantive power to organize and initiate discussions on certain issues outside of party channels.

### **We couldn't**

The second response to the question about how Chile got to this point is "we couldn't avoid it". It is the position of those who knew of the growing discontent, but were unable to remedy its causes due to the institutional regime in place. This situation demonstrates how the current constitution places a series of obstacles in the path of political transformation. With good reason, the constitution's own author, a faithful proponent of the doctrines imposed by the dictatorship, wrote: "The constitution must ensure that, if your opponents come to power, they are constrained to following a course of action not dissimilar from the one that you would desire yourself, because - to use a metaphor - the rules on the playing field offer such a

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<sup>10</sup> <https://observatoriop10.cepal.org/es/mapas/america-latina-caribe-paises-que-contemplan-iniciativa-legislativa-popular>

restricted range of alternatives to the competitors that it is extremely difficult for the opposite to occur".<sup>11</sup>

To achieve the above, the fundamental aspects defining the neoliberal economic model are protected by laws subject to very high quorums. Thus, substantial reforms in matters off-loaded to the market, such as education, health, pensions, work, are difficult or almost impossible to achieve. And, even if they do come to pass, they still must submit to the political control exercised by the Constitutional Court. Many attempts at change have been ultimately rejected by this body, despite being approved by Congress. This is, by the way, one of the strongest cases for adopting a new constitution and not just modifying the existing one.<sup>12</sup>

Now, along with eliminating these "constitutional locks", it is still possible to renew democratic vitality by taking into account the deliberative preferences of citizens through assemblies. These spaces shift the balance of political power, along with granting greater degrees of legitimacy to decisions made on matters of collective concern. While the strength of the exclusively representative system relies on the negotiating abilities of elected officials, the deliberative model transfers this agency to organized citizens. These assemblies, duly regulated, contribute to modifying rules, including constitutional ones, that are obstacles to changes sought by different social groups.

One successful case of the use of these deliberative mechanisms is Ireland.<sup>13</sup> Faced with the need to discuss divisive issues, such as the voluntary termination of pregnancy and same-sex marriage, instead of handing over the debate directly to parliament, a citizens' assembly was convened. This body, made up of people who statistically represented the diversity of the country, listened to experts and discussed their own points of view. In the end, the assembly drew up a proposal to be submitted for approval or rejection by the citizens in a referendum. Once that proposal was approved, the congress began the legislative process according to the citizens' mandate. As is evident, these models allow us to extract issues, in which distinctions such as right-left do not reflect people's preferences, from the homogenizing sphere of political parties.

### **We didn't want to**

The last response is "we didn't want to". This explanation assumes that some members of the political class knew of the discontent among citizens but decided not to remedy its causes, despite having the means to do so. Institutional deficit means not having effective tools to force change when representatives resist it. This situation is displayed and confirmed in the stance of those who refuse to adopt a new constitution. Having witnessed the failure of the current institutional system to mediate social demands, they prefer not to modify it. However,

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<sup>11</sup> Guzmán, J. (1979). "El Camino Político". Revista Realidad 7.

<sup>12</sup> There was a major reform in 2005 which was shut down by these same locks, and an attempt to deliberatively adopt a new constitution in 2016, which was strongly resisted by the opposition to the government at the time, and even by members of the same coalition.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/>

the call for a referendum functions as an institutional mechanism that can force them to debate the new constitution, even if the political will to do so is absent.

From the point of view of deliberative democracy, this stance allows us to make two further reflections. One on the anti-activist stance by institutions and another on how deliberation makes it possible to highlight the people's true interests in public decisions.

The objection against activists goes that by initiating a constituent process, the violent actions that forced this discussion are given legitimacy. Going forward, democracy will be handed over to whoever most forcibly imposes their own terms. In the Chilean case there are at least two reasons to dismiss this undoubtedly important precaution. The first, of a procedural nature, is that the constituent process has three instances of control involving the majority rule of citizens. A referendum to decide whether or not to draft a new constitution, a popular vote of the members who will make up the constituent body, and another referendum, with mandatory voting, to approve or reject the drafted text.

The second reason is substantive in nature, and refers to the need to institutionally mediate citizen demands. As Locke explains<sup>14</sup>, people are willing to suffer the injustices of their governing powers for a long time before challenging their rules. For this reason, when the subjects rise up, attention must be focused on what they are demanding, more so than the actions they used to make their case. In the Chilean situation, the protests highlight the serious lack of legitimacy of both political power and the institutional means used to exercise it. Considering this assertion, the only way to renew legitimacy is to deliberate on the way in which power is being exercised, by listening to those who will obey it.

As regards deliberation as a means to manage conflicting interests, it is worth highlighting what Elster calls: "The civilizing force of hypocrisy"<sup>15</sup>. Given that under conditions of deliberation arguments of self-interest are repudiated, actors tend to adopt, albeit cynically, a stance that is in everyone's favor. It is good that even cynics support the common good, and it is also good that, if they stop doing so, they are shown for who they are.

One example can illustrate the above. After signing the Agreement for Peace and the New Constitution, which shapes the constituent process, various political actors publicly stated that they would approve the adoption of a new constitution, since the good of the country required a new fundamental agreement. However, within a few months, the same actors not only vehemently rejected the idea of issuing a new constitution, but also tried to manipulate the terms of the agreement in order to prevent substantive political change. So, in the same way that it is good that they supported the agreement, it is also good that we now know that they acted cynically when they did so.

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<sup>14</sup> Santos, Milton. *Segundo Tratado del Gobierno Civil*. (II, 225).

<sup>15</sup> Elster, J. (1998). 'Deliberation and Constitution Making'. In Elster, Jon (Ed) *Deliberative Democracy*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

## **Choose hope**

In Chile there are young people who have lost their sight or lost their lives demanding dignity. We must not be indifferent to this fact. Reflecting and holding dialogue about political institutions is not a mere intellectual curiosity, it is a duty of justice which reverberates in our faith. Uniting with those who continue to believe that society can be more humane, and joining together in promoting institutions that would make this likely, is to choose hope together.

*Original Spanish*  
*Translation Nils Sundermann*



## Pandemic and Authoritarianism

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In the current context of the coronavirus or Covid-19 pandemic, we are confronted with different authoritarian political tendencies that pose a threat to democracy. We are also witnessing a global democratic crisis, and there is a need for the participation and leadership of new social actors, who represent sectors of society made vulnerable by Covid-19, to propose a roadmap to accompany these sectors in the post Covid-19 world. We will analyse how authoritarianism is occurring in the context of the pandemic and the challenges involved in constituting democratic supranational spaces or institutions in our globalised world.

### **The Leviathan metaphor and authoritarianism**

The health crisis has unleashed the 'Leviathan' again. This is the title of the classic work by Thomas Hobbes in which he portrays his thoughts and political philosophical reflections. The metaphor of the Leviathan, or sea monster, is taken from the Bible and recreated by Thomas Hobbes in his moral political philosophy to represent the power of the state.<sup>1</sup> The Leviathan is a symbol for a great political force that unifies all things and brings order by way of its absolute power, which cannot be divided, destroyed or disobeyed.<sup>2</sup>

The state only comes into being when a social contract is drawn up and a commonwealth is formed, giving all the rights and powers to the 'Sovereign King'. In fact, Hobbes thinks that people in their natural condition (before government is formed) are driven by self-interest and the survival instinct. When resources are scarce and everyone wants the same things, people live in an environment of war where 'everyone is against everyone else' (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) and life is 'nasty, brutish and short'. To escape from this situation and live in safety, people form a commonwealth surrendering their rights and powers to the sovereign who, with their absolute power, can ensure order and punish all those who violate the law.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hobbes in his political philosophy refers to the mythological figure of the Leviathan which is a sea monster that appears in the book of Job (Ch. 3: 40 and 41), Isaiah (Ch. 27:1) and in Psalms (Ch. 104:26; 74:14). In the Sacred Scriptures, the Leviathan is a dangerous sea creature that creates chaos, evil, intimidates and produces terror in human beings.

<sup>2</sup> Hobbes thought that the word 'Leviathan' came from the Hebrew 'lavah', which means 'to couple, connect or unite', and 'thannin', which means 'dragon' (because it was thought that it had scales that could not be pierced or divided).

If the state is the authority to which citizens give up their rights in Hobbes's conception, the power of the state can be as absolute and unlimited as the right that individuals have given it to ensure 'their security'.

Although our contemporary political situation differs significantly from the situations envisioned by Hobbes, we are seeing once again the dynamic that he expresses so well in his philosophy: people are willing to give up their rights and powers to strong authoritarian politicians in exchange for the promise of peace, security and economic protection.

Therefore, we return to Hobbes' Leviathan metaphor to explore the new Leviathans that are emerging in this health crisis and the manner in which they seriously affect our political and social realities.

The Leviathan metaphor helps us illustrate authoritarianism in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. There are many different sides to the 'Leviathan' in the current pandemic crisis: one presents as a 'Health Leviathan' that appears to be a return to the 'Social State' or the 'Welfare State'; Another side to the Leviathan is embodied in the state of emergency, which manifests in the following ways: greater social restrictions as seen in different countries in the form of the violation of the rights to freedom of movement, the right of assembly and the militarization of territories. Furthermore, in countries where an Asian-style society of digital surveillance does not exist, what we find is the expansion of a less sophisticated surveillance model, carried out by the various security forces in the name of the war on coronavirus, which can impact the most vulnerable sectors to an even greater extent. In a figurative way, the Leviathan presents us with the monstrosity of political power when used in an authoritarian way.<sup>3</sup> But as we will see, there are other aspects that demonstrate the authoritarianism of the Leviathan.

### **Authoritarianism in the pandemic health crisis**

Clearly, in this health crisis we are seeing some of the same tendencies that Hobbes analysed.

First, in times when the general population experiences scarcity of resources and feels threatened, self-interest and aggressive behaviours spread easily which pit people against one another and lead to insecurity and instability. This tendency can also be identified in the context of widespread violence and continuous economic, political and military confrontation. Unfortunately, man becomes a wolf to his fellow man (*homo homini lupus*). We see the same in our current system, in which we are often overwhelmed by the individualistic and utilitarian competition of the market economy and neoliberal globalisation, and in the political confrontations and the struggle for power between the great global protagonists. For these reasons, Thomas Hobbes' political reflections seem very illustrative.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nuso.org/articulo/reflexiones-para-un-mundo-post-coronavirus/>

Second, given this reality, the general population is easily manipulated, and to escape their insecurity, people are willing to hand over their freedoms, rights and powers to authoritarian leaders and regimes in exchange for the promise of security.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made evident the authoritarian tendencies of some political leaders who govern states, and the tendency for democracy to become a 'particracy' where political parties, rather than the people, are the primary basis of rule. Both of these situations are abhorrent.<sup>4</sup> In some authoritarian governments we can observe how the governing bodies and leaders of political parties, in order to maintain the positions they have achieved, enshrine a system of alliances and coalitions to hold onto the political balance of power, preventing significant change from occurring and the emergence of new social issues in the political sphere. The abuse of power impacts and erodes human rights and turns democracy into a power game where the most authoritarian prevails. Let us now analyse some modes or forms of authoritarianism during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- a) One first mode is the abuse of power by governing bodies and the various state authorities in the application of measures that put health protection in conflict with the other rights of the citizen.

The authoritarian tendencies of some governments in the context of the pandemic has favoured the enactment of a State of Emergency restricting the exercise of fundamental rights. The political Leviathan or State of Emergency has in certain circumstances been used to persecute political opponents, without providing means for the freedom of expression and thought of these political groups. In the worst case, these individuals and groups are repressed by way of legal, policing or military coercion. This creates a climate of insecurity that guarantees neither the physical nor the psychological integrity of citizens.

- b) On other occasions, the policies of the 'Health State' have turned into elaborate, cronyist, electoral campaigns, to capture the votes of citizens and achieve desired electoral results for the powers that be, while gaining control of government for their own party.

If the logic of the health Leviathan or 'Health State' has become a way of doing politics, we realize that on many occasions it reinforces inequity in health services, because not all citizens have access to the same treatments, nor to equitable health protection. But, in reality, the inequality in globalisation is structural in nature, since the uneven distribution of world income has worsened abysmally. Let us not forget that poverty and inequity are determining factors for democratic instability.

- c) Another mode is the denial of the existence of Covid-19 by the political, economic and financial elites in order to prioritize productivity and financial activities and to activate channels of commerce in the middle of a pandemic, thereby avoiding any delay or obstacles to economic growth and financial accumulation. In this way, capital is seen

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<sup>4</sup> Pintacuda, E. (1994). *Breve curso de política*. Bilbao, Spain: Sal Terrae, p. 139ff.

as more important than the health of the general population. Thus emerges the mode of the economic-financial Leviathan that is imposed without limitations.

- d) There is another form of authoritarianism that manifests itself in the total ineffectiveness and paralysis of political leaders and governments. They ignore the reality, the impact of the pandemic on the general population and its consequences and, in this case, the governing powers do nothing to deal with the health crisis or support the organization of civil society to prevent and contain the spread of Covid-19. This type of quiescent and unresponsive Leviathan seeks to dismantle and demobilize all political opposition and to impose itself in an underhand way.

These are some visible forms of authoritarianism that violate the rights of citizens in different ways. The danger is that in the face of escalating government measures to restrict assembly, public meetings and debates, and mass demonstrations, little by little civil society becomes immobilized and organized opposition becomes paralyzed in the task of upholding the respect for citizens' rights. Furthermore, in more developed countries highly sophisticated systems of artificial intelligence are used for political purposes to locate and identify people infected with coronavirus, but also to exercise territorial control and to ensure that the general population acquiesces and is prevented from defending its own rights, which are being violated.

Authoritarianism of any sort leads to a situation of ungovernability, and a growing social awareness is emerging that government authorities and institutions must be at the service of citizens. In reality, the vast majority of people and communities who yearn to build democratic societies have no desire for state control, authoritarian governments, or particracies. For these reasons, governments need to consult and dialogue taking into account the expectations and hopes of their citizens, by creating procedures that lead to citizen participation on national issues. In fact, the vast majority increasingly demands transparent explanations of how power is being exercised and questions the relationship that governing powers have with their constituents.

The UN underlines that the pandemic is a global problem that has multiple impacts: “The COVID-19 pandemic is more than a health crisis; it is an economic crisis, a humanitarian crisis, a security crisis, and a human rights crisis. It has highlighted fragilities within and among nations. Coming out of this crisis will require a whole-of-society, whole-of-government and whole-of-the-world approach driven by compassion and solidarity”.<sup>5</sup>

Faced with these expressions of authoritarianism, the concern for politics and the imperative for civil society as regards democracy is the following: how can we guarantee health and food security along with the other rights of the citizen.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/es/coronavirus/UN-response>

## **Globalisation, the crisis of the state and the need for supranational institutions**

Faced with this reality, we realize that guaranteeing the rights of citizens depends on their being fully recognized in a country's political constitution and the rule of law that stems from it, as well as on the state's institutional workings and its different branches of power. Respect for the rights of citizens cannot be built on ineffective government and ineffective state institutions. Obviously, this reality raises the concern to create supranational structures of governance that guarantee the comprehensive security of citizens. It is certainly true that there is an urgent need to create democratic international spaces that respond to the great challenges of the 21st Century; however, we must take into account two obstacles that have to be overcome.

1. Globalisation has curtailed nation states and caused a loss of their sovereignty, assigning them a role as a police force to guarantee and benefit the global market. Consequently, nation states do not have the power to take corrective measures to tackle the great problems that arise from the dynamics of the market and big capital, which operate without restrictions vis-à-vis the general public.

It must be remembered that the various liberal tendencies are united in considering the state as a necessary evil, although its powers should be limited and should not be extended beyond what is necessary.

In a context in which nation states are ceding ground to international markets and global trade, in which the inequality, poverty and social exclusion inherent in globalisation has increased, there is an urgent need to establish authentic social welfare states. This challenge becomes evident in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, because the health protection and broader security of citizens depends on policies adopted to confront the health crisis, economic recession and the socioeconomic consequences for the vast majority of the population, who are impoverished and excluded from the benefits of globalisation.

States are weak and lack legitimacy which becomes an obstacle because the same weaknesses and limitations are carried over when constituting and participating in potential supranational spaces.

2. Today there is a crisis among global and regional institutions in a time when a new world order is coming into being, and there is no sign that this process will come to completion in the short term. It is likely that we will see the new multilateral global order in about twenty or thirty years with new international actors and we hope that this order will be a plural one, but for now, global institutions are at an impasse. We would like multilateralism to be reinforced by a truly democratic culture from citizens and states.

If it is true that supranational bodies are necessary to strengthen democracy and guarantee human rights, the danger of authoritarianism casts a shadow over this project in the absence of a global democratic culture that is devised for the recognition de facto and de jure of citizens and groups without power. Without this democratic culture, supranational structures can

suffer from the same woes as the debilitated, authoritarian democracies of the current states in question.

Authoritarianism is a political problem that has been spreading in our times and in many cases it comes entwined with populism and other accompanying problems that harm human rights, among which we can mention: ethno-nationalism, discrimination against certain groups, hate speech, xenophobia, attacks and forced return of refugees and asylum seekers, mistreatment of migrants, sexual and gender-based violence, etc.

In quantitative terms, the challenge that arises is how to constitute a supranational institution or space with a democratic culture in which the world's 167 countries are represented, without ignoring the fact that 54 of these are governed by authoritarian regimes, 54 by flawed democracies, 22 have full democracies and 37 countries have hybrid regimes.<sup>6</sup> As we can see, there is a prevalence of countries with substantial political problems and democratic deficiencies. The panorama is a complex one and constituting supranational institutions will not be easy in practical terms. This partly explains why the main global institutions such as the UN, the World Trade Organization, the World Health Organization, etc., are currently in crisis and being called into question. This is also true for other regional organizations such as the Organization of American States, the European Union, etc.

However, we cannot ignore that we are standing at the crossroads of relaunching into a new era: either we continue with the great pre-pandemic global economic, financial and political trends, or we are reborn into a new political and economic democracy without authoritarianism in the post-coronavirus era.

We can discard all the great lessons so painfully learned from this pandemic, or we can be reborn into a new democracy of solidarity and fraternity with those who have always been excluded from the benefits of the economic race during this historical period.

We are experiencing the rediscovery of the meaning of politics and the importance of the welfare state and the universal right to health in the face of healthcare crises. If we abandon coronavirus pandemic clinical health services to the market, most likely 80% of the global population will have no access to the cure and treatments for this plague. And the remaining 20% will always be exposed to contagion.

We are increasingly feeling a sense of belonging to the human community and the importance of a holistic and ecological approach to security in the face of the vulnerability and hardships facing communities. Health care must be holistic. It brings joy to hear how the evil of this pandemic has done so much good when it comes to protecting our common home. The air has been purified and pollution levels have decreased due to the economic slowdown, as can be seen from satellite photographs of planet earth. It would be an extraordinary experience if politics really became a vehicle to carry out justice and achieve the common good that we so greatly need. Hopefully, all these reflections on authoritarianism, populism and the role of politics in times of the coronavirus will help us to recreate politics on the terms of the most

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Democracy Index 2019* from *The Economist*.

vulnerable in society and those who always suffer the disastrous consequences of these scourges.

*Original Spanish*  
*Translation Nils Sundermann*



## Debate on Democracy, Contributions from Central America

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### Formal Government and Real Government

It sounds like a play on words. But this is our reality. The government, with its three branches of state, is one thing; how the country is actually governed, beyond the formalities of these branches, is another. According to the rule of law that regulates our democracy, the people are sovereign and they govern by way of laws, and not through specific individuals who impose their decisions.

No person is above the law, and it is determined that the government is formally elected in electoral processes. Every four, five or six years, depending on the country, citizens are convened to elect by secret ballot the officials that have decided to run for public office. However, actions speak louder than words, and it is no secret that decision-making and control over the instruments and institutional framework of what we call democracy is limited to a restricted leadership. The latter is rooted in the patrimonial political culture, which is the cultural wellspring of *caudillos* - Latin America's version of strongmen - as well as all the cult of personality and arbitrariness that prevent institutional democracy and the rule of law from truly taking root and flourishing.

### Elections: An Essential Feature of the Rule of law

Following the formula of democracy, the election of public officials is an essential feature of the rule of law. In our Central American countries there are democratic elections of public officials within the framework of the rule of law. However, given that strict control is exercised over these by a restricted leadership circle, and that the political parties are subordinate to these leaderships - which makes them the very opposite of democratic - the right of citizens to freely elect their officials is violated and the very foundations of the rule of law are undermined. Many of the institutional reforms that have been promoted over the last 25 years, after the end of the civil conflicts in Central America, have had more to do with international pressure on politicians and officials in our countries, than with the need being felt by Central Americans for a response to the demands and challenges of the world that is being built in the twenty-first century.

However, many of the reforms intended to consolidate the rule of law have been corrupted or manipulated by the same officials responsible for bringing them into force, precisely

because the latter are subordinate to the political party system with its strong anti-democratic tendencies, which in practice is completely at odds with the democracy it professes to defend and represent. Because it is intrinsically anti-democratic, the political party system transforms all the instruments paradoxically intended to strengthen democracy into anti-democratic ones. It is true that many efforts have been made to make the political system and legislation functional, even the international community has on many occasions demanded that state institutions be modernised as a condition of its cooperation. However, leaders and public officials, in general, always return to their old ways: they behave as if - and clearly believe that - holding a public office means they are above the rest.

### **Who Chooses Those We Elect to Govern Us?**

Formally, they are chosen by their parties in elections fought between various internal political factions. So who chooses the candidates within each of these factions?

Only those who have the leader's blessing, and who tacitly recognise this sole authority or the team in command of the political party, can be a candidate for an election for public office. Normally, the most important government positions require not only the endorsement of the main leaders or political party bosses, but also endorsements from high-ranking officials in the army, leading business figures and the blessing of the American Embassy.

It would be difficult for a citizen to become a candidate for the Presidency without having passed through all these filters. The same can be said of those appointed as Ombudsman, President of the Supreme Court of Justice, members of the Supreme Court and Auditor or Attorney General of the Republic. Powerful groups and individuals consent to or veto candidates for popular election through the media.

There is another actor that is increasingly influencing the election of candidates to the most important positions in public administration. The generic name commonly used to identify this force is Organised Crime, and it is headed up by *narcotráficos* - drug trafficking gangs. Very trustworthy sources hold that the various organised crime mafias move freely through the corridors of electoral politics and the capital of the most important private sector economic groups.

When a candidate speaks with absolute certainty that they will come to occupy a high-ranking public office, this certainty does not come from the popular support they enjoy, rather from the financial and political support that one way or another comes from some of the mafias that operate in our national territories. If Organised Crime - which deals in kidnappings and the trafficking of people, weapons and drugs - transfers vast sums to leaders and factions within political parties, it is without a doubt because politics has become a source of investment and laundering of their capital and, ultimately, a beachhead from which to exercise and extend their power and control over society.

### **The Landscape of Democracy in Central America**

When people with good will and civic duty go to cast their vote, the candidates have already been chosen by those who truly - and without the need for elections - make the most important

decisions for the country. What are elections for then? They are an exercise that gives people a sense of responsibility for choosing their elected officials, thereby exercising one of their rights guaranteed by the Constitution. However, the iron grip that powerful groups have over the machinery of democracy means that the public vote simply ends up legitimising public authorities, whose candidates are endorsed and trusted by powerful groups and individuals to administer the country's resources, pass legislation and apply it according to their own best interests.

Democracy and the rule of law operate and are sustained by two governments: one is formally and legally elected by public vote, and the other is composed of the groups who truly wield power, the very same ones that appoint and endorse those who will be elected to formal government. Between these two governments, the true one, the lasting one and the one that actually decides and commands, is the one that functions above and beyond the electoral political cycle, that uses democracy and all its machinery to legitimise its decisions, protects its own interests and almost invariably act behind the backs of poor people.

### **Representative Political Democracy versus Participatory and Economic Democracy**

When democracy is reduced to representative political democracy, there is a risk, as is the case in several of our Central American countries, of legitimising certain dominant power factions and the concentration of wealth and common public goods. Achieving political stability in a democracy is inconceivable as long as we continue to have an economic model that relentlessly produces multi-millionaires and poor people. Herein lies the structural element of democratic destabilisation.

Today's democracy, based on political parties, through which societies elect their governors and officials, is just one iteration of democracy. Representative political democracy is certainly an iteration of democracy, but its meaning cannot, and should not, be essentialised to this reductive conceptualisation. Political parties may be forces of change, but this is not always the case, nor can the struggle for social change fall solely on their shoulders.

Fundamental social and political transformation must combine the political struggle to enter government together with the political struggle to democratise the economy, society and culture. This is achieved when movements exist that exert pressure from below. Political parties, both right and left wing ones, do not always take kindly to this. Political democracy without the transformation of the model of economic inequality, will always be a half democracy, a mediocre democracy, a false one or a veneer of democracy. What we have today in representative democracies in various Central American countries echoes this to an extent.

Without social movements exerting pressure from below - holding representative political democracy to account, demanding and obliging the existence of representative democracy - political parties will become experts in democracy, but one based on compromises between leaderships and cut off from the everyday lives of the common people.

In the case of some Central American countries, such as Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, people go to the polls, confident in this means of exercising their right to elect their officials. But in the opinion polls carried out annually by Jesuit universities and research

institutions in El Salvador and Honduras (Cf. Instituto de Opinión Pública de la UCA de San Salvador; ERIC-SJ, Honduras), people are very clear in their view that political parties are all far-removed from their needs, ignore their demands, and that the leaders make deals to divvy up positions among themselves, regardless of the needs of society. In terms of the democratization of society, the task at hand is for political leaders to close the aforementioned gap, and for social movements to be established and rooted in the daily reality of the general population while maintaining autonomy from political parties.

The quid pro quo mentality of the majority of the population is based on the reality of survival. It underpins a tacit pact between political party leaders and the people who are in survival mode. According to the various polls carried out in El Salvador and Honduras, the level of social and political awareness in society is in such a poor state that for a majority - more than sixty percent of the population - they do not care who is in government or who is in opposition.

They do not care who the person with the answers to their problems is, or where they come from, only that this figure, by whatever manner or means, does indeed solve their problems of food, security and employment. The least of their worries is whether the government who guarantees them food and security is authoritarian, populist or dictatorial. This is undoubtedly the bitterest outcome produced by democracy with its parties and elections. This political terrain is a fertile ground for the strong to pose as democrats, despite their messianic or dictatorial notions, which is a reality that casts a long and threatening shadow over present-day Central America.

### **General Challenges in Constructing Democracy for the Church and the Society of Jesus**

- 1) Contribute to the proper functioning of institutions over the whims of particular political and economic individuals or groups. The weakness or absence of institutions debilitates democracy and shuts down governance, while strengthening traditional power groups and hidden influences that circulate through clandestine networks of illegality and power abuse.
- 2) Take on the task of strengthening the social movement by linking together demands that emerge from territory-based community organisations. Constructing participatory democracy is inconceivable without the social, economic and cultural fabric of communities' own democratic experiences.
- 3) Representative political democracy is an iteration of democracy, but its meaning cannot - and should not - be essentialised to this reductive conceptualisation. Political parties may be forces of change, but this is not always the case, nor can the struggle for social transformation fall solely on their shoulders. Through the words of Pope Francis and St. Monsignor Romero, the Church must continue to encourage people to organise and popular movements to become actors that campaign for democracy and for a social and economic model that guarantees a fair distribution of wealth and assets

(cf. The Pope's words to the popular movements gathered in Rome and Bolivia, and St. Romero to the popular organisations in El Salvador).

- 4) Fundamental social and political transformation must combine the political struggle to enter government together with the political struggle to democratise the economy, representation and participation. This is achieved if there are movements that exert pressure from below, as encouraged by the Church in its social dimension. And this is not always accepted. Political democracy without transformation of the model of economic inequality will always be, at best, a half democracy, or a veneer of democracy. Representative democracy that does not encompass spaces for debating and deliberating on society's great issues, runs the permanent risk of representing small elites and leaders, and imposing their rule instead of the thoughts and desires of the majority.
- 5) Without social movements exerting pressure from below - holding representative political democracy to account, demanding and obliging the existence of deliberative and participatory democracy - political parties will be able to guarantee the existence of representative democracy in form, but not that it will be authentically democratic. The option for the poor, as the Church reminds us, is the approach of a commitment from the bottom-up, because by taking this human reality as our starting point, we can be most faithful to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 6) Building a representative, deliberative and participatory democracy must be linked to the construction of a civic political culture. This involves unlearning processes of patrimonial and patriarchal political culture, which is one of the greatest challenges for the Church and the Society of Jesus with their strong hierarchical and vertical traditions.
- 7) According to the Gospel, the person who proclaims the Word of God must bear testament with their deeds (cf. Matt 7:21-27). If in the Church and the Society of Jesus we are to speak of democracy and civic culture, we must do so through the example of building internal processes that challenge the dominant patriarchal culture and the vertical structure that configures our relationships. Only if we are successful in the areas of democracy and civic culture within our structures will our words be credible and will it be possible for our proposals to have an impact on society. Because, after all, the testament that accompanies the word is what sows deep and lasting transformation.

*Original Spanish*  
*Translation Nils Sundermann*



## Transforming Democracies in a Globalised World - Philosophical Perspectives

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The discourse about democracy is one of the most controversial today. Some even diagnose a crisis of democracy. One important reason for this seems to be that democracy is unable to cope with current challenges in many regions of the world, especially to cope with global challenges. Looking back at the younger history of European democracies, many political crises seem to be caused by global phenomena: from 9/11 and financial to climate and COVID-19 crisis. An analysis of these crises shows a close connection between foreign and domestic factors. The pressing issues of the present are no longer purely national issues, but always have – and often even primarily – a global dimension.<sup>1</sup>

Facing these challenges, many European democracies often seem to neglect this interconnection between national and global issues. This is also true concerning the political actions during the last months. Although COVID-19 is obviously a global crisis, many political actions were framed within a national heuristic. One might conclude that democracies are part of global processes, but often still operate with national founded concepts of politics. This is one of the reasons, why many political solutions of democracies failed today.

This observation leads to the basic question: Is democracy prepared for globalisation in general and global crisis in particular? My thesis is that the apparent overstraining of democracy depends on a deficient interpretation of politics. The lens through which people look at the political sphere is coming from a different time and its suitability to understand the world as it is today is limited. For the development of an alternative blueprint, political philosophy can help to understand the underlying dynamics of a globalised world, and to develop some alternative political perspectives. I want to show some of these consequences and how philosophy could help to transform democratic practices.

First, in a globalised world, people are always part of different practices, which could no longer strictly located on one geographic level. Using modern technologies people constitute dynamic practices all over the world, which could not be conceptualised within the framework of nation states or homogeneous cultural communities. Thus, the structure and formation of

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on Reder, Michael (2018): 'Is Democracy Ready for Globalisation? Pathways to a Globalised Demos' in: *Argumenta philosophica* (2) 81-97.

the political sphere is changing fundamentally. A clear distinction between local and global does not make any sense anymore. Democracy as rule of the political sphere must accept these transformations. Thus, democracy must develop new forms of self-understanding and procedures dealing with this new contexts and dynamics.

The considerations about current characteristics of society beyond the distinction of global and local also ask for a new approach reflecting on plurality. One significant implication of globalisation is that people experience social reality more than ever as pluralistic. As people can travel to, or even settle down in other regions and to communicate and interact with people all over the world, they experience the variety of living forms, cultural traditions or political opinions. Homogeneous societies do not exist anymore, and they will not exist in the future. Instead of exploring homogenous fundamentals for social life, democracies should reflect more and develop the interferences between the plural practices and discourses, which constitute the social and political sphere.

If democracies would reflect on the global and plural character of their social fundamentals, it would be easier to explore forms of integrating different cultural traditions in social life. In the perspective of an early pragmatist philosopher – John Dewey – democracies should find new forms of sharing experiences from different cultural contexts, in order to ask how they could stimulate the growth of the people. To understand this plurality, democracies must find new public places and support alternative forms, with which people can share their experiences and develop a new self-understanding of globalised citizens.

Of course, nowadays we are facing new forms of re-nationalisation and some democracies even want to go back in time and to revitalise homogeneous forms of living together. However, such concepts of democracy neglect the globalised world, both its relational structure and its complex challenges. Furthermore, also new nationalists do not develop their 'own' and separated strategy. They are also part of globalised practices and share common interpretations of experiences. Therefore, also this self-concept of democracy is a globalised one. Nevertheless, it is not enough.

Starting with an analysis of experiences helps democracies to understand the relational structure of the globalised world. Reconstructing experiences helps to understand, in what way both people and social processes are interconnected. Concerning global challenges like climate change, it sometimes seems that democracies ignore this relational net of experiences and conceptualise such problems only referring to the framework of the nation state. Therefore, for example, in various academic disciplines political philosophy has started a big debate on the all-affected principle. The main idea of this principle is that in globalised times many people are affected from decisions made by other states. The discourse reflects, if those who are affected should be also integrated in the political decision, which is responsible for their situation and experiences.

This debate explains the challenge for current democracies: In earlier times, it seems to be clear, who is the *demos* of democracy. In a globalised world, this border of the *demos* changes and, thus, becomes weaker. For example, we must think about if and how future generations are part of the *demos* or democracy. Thus, democracies must discuss what *demos* means in

circumstances, in which political decisions imply global and long-term consequences. Hence, a detailed reflection of global problems is an important issue for democracies.

In this context, democrats should always discuss who is not seen as part of the demos: Who is excluded? For example, Philosophers like Rancière Jacques focus on the excluded and precarious forms of life. Democracy was from its beginning a form of political governing that integrated those, who very not privileged from birth, wealth, with knowledge or a voice. "The 'power of the demos' referred to the fact that those who rule are those whose only commonality is that they have no entitlement to govern. Before being the name of a community, the demos is the name of a part of the community: the poor. But the 'poor', precisely, does not designate an economically disadvantaged part of the population, but simply the people who do not count" (Rancière 2010, 32). This focus on the 'poor' and the excluded people, who suffer a precarious life, is the most essential and founding characteristic of democracy. This is important to remember in a globalised world, in which democracies often produce new forms of exclusion.

Pragmatist philosophers like Dewey could help to understand another challenge of current democracies: Dewey argues that democracies should not focus on ideal institutions, but on the experimental dealing with the experiences of the people. In this regard, democracies should less focus on institutional structures based on theoretical arguments, but on the attitude of the citizens, who recognise the variety of experiences as a fundamental of the political sphere.

Let me illustrate this idea referring, again, to climate change as concrete global challenge of democracies. Discourses about climate change should reflect on experiences people make facing climate impacts. On this basis, it should be asked, what practices might be helpful to deal with climate impacts and to promote the growth of experiences of all people affected by them. Of course, the reflection on new climate institutions is important in that perspective. But environmental ethics should also develop a narrative, which integrates different cultural traditions as accumulated experiences. An example for such a strategy, is the current interest in religions as cultural actors in the ethical discourse about environmental problems.

All these efforts to reform and vitalize democracy must be aware that democracy never comes to an end. This means, that there will never exist one *perfect* democratic institution or comprehensive and sufficient mechanism of representation. Democracy is probably the only form of government that always has to evaluate and improve over time. At the same time, it is also the only political form that always reflects its own base in a self-critical manner. The philosopher Jacques Derrida calls this the 'democracy to come'. The word 'coming' expresses the radical possibility to criticise and reform the existing political structures. Therefore, democracy is always radical social criticism, especially facing new challenges connected to globalisation.

Against this background, it is obvious, that many conflicts form democracies. The conflictive dispute between opinions and political perspectives is not a deficit of democracy, but a fundamental characteristic. Maybe, some Western democracies focused too much on the compromise of opinions during the last two decades. This desire for harmonising political

conflicts is obvious, if we are looking back ten years in German history. Since 2011, Germany is governed by a 'big coalition' of the two biggest parties. Referring to several surveys, the German population has a clear preference for this form of coalition, because people interpret the coalition as the best form of balancing controversial opinions facing the current (global) challenges.

Due to this desire for compromise and consensus, the awareness for the plurality of different political perspectives is sometimes neglected (or even ignored), which in turn is a danger for the democracy itself. The agendas of the new right-wing movements and parties emerge exactly from that lack. They refer to topics (or fears) that were not such much on the political agenda and sharpened and twisted them. Because a controversial dispute about these issues was missing, one can conclude, new movements developed, which are much more radical than the traditional parties are. Often, they even argue against the base of German self-understanding of democracy which is, then, highly problematic.

Democracies must be aware of right-wing movements and their tendency to undermine democratic culture. And, also controversial positions must be deliberated. Nevertheless, passionate disagreement is not only part of private disputes, but an integral element of democracy. Thus, people could also identify themselves emotionally with the different opinions and become more easily motivated to engage in democratic procedures. Of course, democracies have to be aware that the different opinions respect each other. But they also have to be aware of not harmonising plurality too much.

Let me give another example, which is not connected with the emergence of the right-wing movements, but more to the general tendency of liberal democracies to harmonize arguments, namely the debate about the political role of religions in modern societies. From the demonstrated standpoint, religions should not be interpreted as opaque decisions made by individual believers that cannot be integrated in the harmonised secular reason. Rather, they form cultural practices that affect the whole human being and the reality of human life and are reliant on the diverse experiences of the human being. Religions can be understood as forms of dealing with religious experiences whereby they constitute a social praxis that makes a broad claim towards religious people. Therefore, religion should not be automatically restricted to the private sphere but be integrated in political processes.

Let me conclude with a last important aspect for healing democracies facing global challenges and crises. If democracy is (in the Deweyan sense) an experimental practice of all citizens, education becomes fundamental, because democracy is the ongoing process of dealing with experiences – emotionally and rationally. Democracy is a process of learning. Thus, education is not a secondary function of democracy, but a fundamental characteristic of the democratic ethos. There is no future for democratic societies, if they are not learning societies. The aim of education is the growth of experiences and therefore the development of democracy. Education helps people to become critical concerning existing values, structures and institutions and to develop new perspectives for the future of democracy.

Facing tremendous global challenges, such a concept of education is essential for democracies today. Education is not important to prepare individuals for the best self-performance in a

globalised world, but to reconstruct, understand and reflect both the structure of global dynamics and their hegemonic impacts. Education helps to prepare democracies for globalisation and its challenges.

*Original in English*



## Democracy, Liberty and Conscience

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Liberty is about saying what you think, meeting whom you choose and engaging without fear in shared projects, but that is not the whole story. Liberty is an experience of what political theorist Phillip Pettit calls 'common knowledge.'<sup>1</sup> A good example of this experience is being part of an audience in a theatre. It is not just that we know what the actors are saying and doing and that we are affected by what they say and do, but we know that everyone around us knows what we know and that everyone knows that everyone is affected by that knowledge.

Common knowledge pertains to both liberty and 'domination' (a word used by Pettit to describe the absence of liberty).<sup>2</sup> When there is common knowledge about the dominance of one group over another both sides 'will share the awareness that the powerless can do nothing except by leave of the powerful.'<sup>3</sup> In the absence of liberty, people both know about, and reinforce, each other's powerlessness. Liberty can only thrive when government sets itself the task of preventing domination by any one group and it can only do this by rendering itself accountable to the concerns of the governed. Without this democratic accountability, the erosion of liberty is inevitable.

### Ancient Rome

There have been two periods of history when liberty flourished for a sustained period. All citizens in the ancient Roman republic were male and many were slave owners, but their enjoyment of liberty was no less real for that. Rome thrived and part of this thriving was the conquest of foreign lands, but this external conquest would be the republic's undoing. The military heroes arriving home in triumph came with vast and previously unimaginable wealth and they used this wealth, and their own popularity, to subvert the political process. The republic was corrupted by wholesale bribery and the hiring of thugs to influence elections<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Pettit P. (1997). *A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford. p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 58-61, 70-72

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.61.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, LR. (1971). *Party politics in the Age of Caesar*. London; Holland T. (2003). *Rubicon: The Triumph and Tragedy of the Roman Republic*. London.

Eventually the 'imperator' or 'emperor' replaced the citizen as the source of political authority. We are well acquainted with emperors and empires but, for the ancient Romans, the word 'imperator' referred to the military rank of General. The military power of Rome, which had been used to dominate conquered territories, was now used to dominate the city itself.

## **Nations at War**

The second period of enduring liberty came with the emergence of the democratic nation state in the aftermath of the American and French revolutions. Unlike in ancient Rome, this period marked both a progressive elimination of slavery and an unprecedented extension of the suffrage. The value of human equality was taking root as an ideal, though the reality was more complex.

The granting of (not quite) universal male suffrage illustrates this ambivalence. In France a recently crowned Napoleon III would give working class men the vote while, at the same time, drastically curtailing the powers of the National Assembly. In a newly united Germany Chancellor Bismarck had no need to undermine an already neutered Reichstag. The sovereignty of the British Parliament was unassailable, but Benjamin Disraeli figured that giving the vote to working class men would win their gratitude and their votes. He would be proved right, but Disraeli, no more than Napoleon or Bismarck, was no democrat.<sup>5</sup>

These political leaders offered Europe's new voters some genuinely enlightened policies but their real interest was in fostering national pride in the service of colonial expansion. They understood all too well the need to win popular support for their imperial ventures and their strategy succeeded to the point that the size and wealth of a nation's empire became the measure of its 'greatness.' The limits of empire, however, are determined solely by military prowess and the imperial powers of Europe soon found themselves in the grip of a deadly rivalry which ended in two disastrous wars.

## **Unaccountable Wealth**

Democracy in Europe survived with the help of the United States on both occasions and, on the second, with that of the Soviet Union. In the Cold War the US would come again to Europe's aid in resisting Soviet expansion. During these years western democracies flourished and those living in them enjoyed unprecedented personal freedom and unprecedented standards of living. This period was also marked by the growing cultural influence of the United States and the emerging global dominance of a group of transnational corporations which were largely, but by no means entirely, American.

The empires of Europe have been replaced by nation-states, which present themselves as sovereign and independent, but the reality is quite different. The wealth of a small number of transnational corporations is now comparable in its dominance to the wealth of military leaders during the last years of the Roman republic. As with the generals of ancient Rome

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<sup>5</sup> 'Disraeli... believed in 'a world of empire, sustained and manipulated by the skills of bankers, priests, beautiful women and secret societies.' Hurd, D. & Young E. (2013). *Disraeli or the Two Lives*. London. p.252.

there is no political framework to supervise these entities and no effective strategy has been put in place to deal with their vast unaccountable wealth.

## **The People**

To meet this challenge we need a globalised political power which enjoys democratic legitimacy. That legitimacy has been traditionally associated with the nation state and has been dramatized by the slogan 'we the people.' This narrative cannot simply be set aside in the name of a notional universal solidarity, because political symbols only work if they are part of an inherited drama.

The people as a symbol of democratic government is a good example of this process. 'The people' are always the people of somewhere and that somewhere is defined by an inherited sovereignty. Until recent times, the crown has been the supreme symbol of territorial sovereignty, but the sovereignty once represented by the crown is now represented by the people. Ideas such as parliament, majority rule and representation are not viable unless they are connected to some kind of claim to territorial sovereignty.

With few exceptions, usually related to oil, all governments now claim to act in the name of the people but there are contrasting ways of making this claim. Some governments present themselves as the direct embodiment of 'the people.' Government is the sovereign voice and any voice raised in opposition is an enemy of the state. Under these conditions liberty cannot survive.

A democratic government, by contrast, will recognise that 'the people' are the source of its legitimacy. Those who hold public office will refer to 'the people' in a manner which seeks to persuade listeners that anyone and everyone can play a part in government. When 'the people' is referred to by anyone else, in this democratic context, it is with a view to persuading those in positions of power to listen in a conscientious manner.<sup>6</sup>

## **Being Accountable**

The resulting drama is one of inclusion and accountability, which reinforces both the legitimacy of government and liberty itself. It also replicates the workings of conscience and an awareness of the relationship of conscience and liberty can be seen in the very first great declaration of nationhood in 1581. The Dutch Act of Abjuration<sup>7</sup> condemns 'the King of Spain' for tyrannizing over people's consciences 'for which they believed themselves accountable to God only.' Because he failed to respect freedom of conscience and demanded 'slavish compliance,' his subjects could hold him to account and "legally proceed to the choice of another prince." This was one of Europe's first steps in democratic accountability.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Grace E. (2007). *Democracy and Public Happiness*. Dublin. p.26.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/before-1600/plakkaat-van-verlatinghe-1581-july-26.php>

<sup>8</sup> It was followed, a mere twenty one years later, by the founding of the Dutch East India Company. The link between democracy and empire deserves further scrutiny.

The Dutch Republic was not a democracy, but it had one vital feature of democratic government. An unresolved fragmentation of power between two organs of government - military and financial - meant that government could not dominate the population in the way of absolute monarchies which were seen as the norm in seventeenth century Europe. This made possible a true experience of liberty which aristocratic visitors from other countries found disconcerting and even scandalous.<sup>9</sup>

This 'fragmentation' echoes the conflicting voices of conscience as issues are faced and resolved - often after sustained periods of delay and self-deception. These shifting influences and conflicting voices in themselves have no purpose, but what gives them their edge of drama is a sense of responsibility. Conscience looks beyond this inner debate and calls, with varying degrees of urgency, for judgement leading to action.

### **Personal and Public**

As well as being deeply personal the drama of conscience is inescapably public. As issues are resolved this leads to action and, invariably, to engagement with others. When this happens in a context of liberty it can lead to high levels of mutual trust and to effective organisation in the pursuit of significant objectives. It also makes possible that peaceful tolerance of conflict which is the distinguishing hallmark of democratic politics. Conscientious people can find themselves in conflict without losing an underlying trust in each other's goodwill.

A democratic society is never free of conflict just as conscience is never free of its inner voices and a government which tolerates the conflicting voices of citizens embodies the working of conscience in the public forum. The electoral process is a dramatisation of these inner workings, with its competing voices, uninhibited debate and measurable outcomes. Free elections and free speech, however, are no guarantee of good government. Just as a conscientious mind can be misguided, 'the people' can be manipulated with disastrous results.

### **The Conscience of Humanity**

As the Second World War came to an end the victorious allies gave the world the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Preamble speaks of "the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" and of how "disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind."<sup>10</sup> It goes on to list numerous rights including the right of everyone 'to take part in the government of his country.' It states that the will of the people 'shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage.'

The UN Charter, adopted seventy five years ago, presents itself as an appeal to the conscience of humanity but, given the wars, tyrannies and massacres of our time, this appeal remains very much at the level of aspiration. Part of the process of conscience, however, is a capacity

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<sup>9</sup> Israel J. (1995). *The Rise and Fall of the Dutch Republic*. Oxford. pp 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>

to tolerate the ambivalence not as something good, but as something unavoidable. Without such tolerance an appeal to conscience is replaced by condemnation without reflection. The fanatic and the terrorist thrive in such conditions, whereas those who seek liberty are ready to endure the uncertainty and delay demanded by open debate and peaceful politics.

At the same time interminable talk, without any measurable engagement with reality, is a scandal to the conscientious world view.

## **Coal and Steel**

This spirit of measurable engagement is to be found in another document born of the horrors of modern warfare. The Schuman Declaration speaks of promoting world peace by taking 'creative steps' and it concerns itself with two commodities on which modern warfare depends - coal and steel. It consciously sets out to establish a supranational authority with power to bind the member states in relation to the use of these commodities.

The European Union would later evolve a most elaborate set of detailed regulations dealing with the composition of consumer goods. This clear focus on specific substances, with a view to protecting the rights of citizens, has been a defining feature in the free movement of goods within the EU. At global level, however, no political structure is in place to challenge the economic exploitation and ecological destruction resulting from unsupervised free trade.

A democratic response to this situation will have to find a way of moving beyond 'the people' to the wider drama of 'the conscience of humanity.' The narrative underlying this drama will have to include the voices of the nations, but these voices will themselves always be ambivalent. We will need to anchor this project in external realities in the way that the Schuman Declaration focused on coal and steel.

## **The Resources of the Earth**

Within the UN system the use of the earth's resources is emerging as such a focus. The protection of the environment will require attention at global level to the use of resources everywhere, because acts destructive of the environment, while affecting the entire planet, take place at local level. The UN International Resource Panel was founded in 2007 and, in its mission statement, speaks of "a new paradigm of resource use that is socially equitable, economically efficient, and environmentally healthy."<sup>11</sup> In a report published in 2017 it spoke of a 'systems approach' to natural resources which connects "the flow of resources - from extraction through to final waste disposal - with their use and impact on the environment, economies and societies."<sup>12</sup>

This approach is implicitly endorsed by Pope Francis in his call for "stronger and more efficiently organized international institutions, with functionaries who are appointed fairly by agreement among national governments, and empowered to impose sanctions."<sup>13</sup> In the

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.resourcepanel.org/about-us>

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Environment Programme. (2017). *Assessing Global Resource Use*, p.10.

<sup>13</sup> *Laudato Si'* § 175; *Fratelli Tutti* § 173.

recently published encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti' he reiterates Benedict XVI's call for the reform of global governance "so that the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth."<sup>14</sup> Such 'teeth' will only be able to bite if they are rooted in the political symbols of liberty and nationhood.

### **Liberty and Human Thriving**

The concept of national independence has served democracy well, but the growing globalisation of wealth is robbing this concept of substance. This situation is best remedied by a sharing of sovereignty, but this 'sharing' is not like the dividing up of a cake; it is a new form of political authority and, to be seen as legitimate, it must be seen to be accountable.

Increasingly, however, national governments are seen as unaccountable and beyond the reach of citizens. When they participate in international projects an even greater sense of distance opens up between those projects and those same citizens. The principle of subsidiarity, with its emphasis on decisions being made at the lowest possible level, is designed to ensure the maximum participation of citizens in government. The founders of the United States understood the value of participation. They spoke of the public happiness by which they meant the citizen's right to be 'a participator in the government of affairs.' For them liberty was not just about individual freedom but about 'access to the public forum.'<sup>15</sup> To speak of subsidiarity in isolation puts the focus on governmental structures and not on human experience of liberty without which subsidiarity has no purpose.

The principle of subsidiarity has a vital role to play in the democratic management of the resources of the earth, but without a permanent forum to review decision-making at every level it will remain at the level of abstract ideas. This forum will depend on the willingness of every nation to uphold the principle of subsidiarity both in its own internal affairs and in its dealings with other nations. The overarching aim of such a forum would be to ensure that the resources of the earth are used in a way, which respects liberty and human thriving.

*Original in English*

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<sup>14</sup> *Caritas in Veritate* § 67; *Fratelli Tutti* § 173.

<sup>15</sup> Arendt H. (2009). *On Revolution*. Penguin. p 127.



## The Spirit of Democracy

**Pierre de Charentenay, SJ**

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Alexis de Tocqueville taught us that democracy is not only a set of institutions but also a spirit which we have to care for. We see this spirit being attacked by individualism, corruption and populism. The result is a dramatic increase in the number of authoritarian and populist states and the slow destruction of democratic institutions. How can we analyse that phenomenon and what would be the counter to the poison of such a dangerous evolution?

### Major Transformations

In the last fifty years, our countries in Europe have gone through major transformations. Let us examine some of them.

Sociological transformations first. Globalisation has changed the structure of our societies, which are more and more divided between elite people, integrated into an incredible world network in which they move around, and static people who have no mobility and live a difficult life with a very tight budget. From that opposition, inequality and frustration starts. The middle class is drifting into poverty while they see the richest become richer than ever. To that general overview we must add the disappearance of intermediate bodies, which are supposed to be essential to the vitality of a society according to the Social doctrine of the Church. Corruption is more visible than ever when famous politicians, candidates to the highest position like François Fillon<sup>1</sup> are indicted and condemned. On a more cultural level, individualism is ever growing, leaving aside the common good and attention to the community. These transformations are slow, but they touch the way citizens are related to one another. They touch the spirit of democracy and the capabilities of building a just way of living together.

Another set of transformations come from the technical sector, namely the media and communication. French people are watching TV for around 4 hours a day, which is a solitary activity in line with what David Riesman wrote in 'The Lonely Crowd', in 1950. The ties between citizens are disappearing in this process. Social networks have changed the picture allowing new relations between individuals, but in an anonymous way which sets aside the responsibility of personal connection. It produces an incredible violence in a system of impulsive reaction. Who can trust what is said on the social medias, which are the mirror of

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<sup>1</sup> Former Prime Minister of France (2007-2012), and candidate to the Presidency

subjectivism and multiple passions. It does create new relations between citizens but allows extreme views to be exposed to the general public with a different credibility since it is published on the Internet. We are still far from understanding the effect of social medias in the democratic process.

All these transformations have had an impact on the political discourse. We have seen in the last years how this discourse appeals not to truth and objectivity but to subjective or unconscious feelings beyond the truth. This time of post-truth has allowed the development of fake-news from the top political personnel at the national level. Politicians are influenced by a short periodicity of elections to which they are submitted regularly. They must keep the attention of the public in order to maintain the surveys in their favor. Because of social networks, they know that the truth is not the criteria of interest for the public. The citizen chooses what he/she likes in the medias, and he/she decides what the truth is: "I have seen it on TV", "I read it on Internet": this becomes the truth. Although the Internet has no credibility, many citizens believe what they read on the screen. This is somewhat frightening when one knows how the Internet can be manipulated either by foreign powers or by big companies. Facebook has for a long time ignored that threat, but they are gradually taking measures to avoid the worst fake news and obvious lies on their network. Because of all these changes, the political discourse has become full of feelings and emotion, passion and violence, mockery and derision. The language of civilised reason and argument is far from today's rhetoric.

This huge evolution of public speech has changed the way citizens experience democracy. They are under pressure, moved by fear and threat while they have no real idea of what is going on. The more serious and objective press is not appreciated any more while news papers and opinion of TV channels are giving a much distorted image of reality, shaped by political leaders.

Citizens having different opinions are becoming enemies who are not worthy of respect. A process of demonization of the opponent is getting very strong. The confrontation between ideas and programs does not take place anymore. The respect that A. de Tocqueville thought necessary between minority and majority does not exist anymore. The group in power uses it in order to push its advantage. An extraordinary example of hindrance has been given in the way the American Republican party refused to accept the nominee of President Obama for the Supreme Court in February 2016, after the death of Antonin Scalia nine months before the next election, under the excuse of the on-going election campaign. This was clearly against the spirit of democracy. Now in 2020 after the death of Ruth Bader Ginsberg, less than two months before the election, will the Republican party apply the same rule? There never has been any Justice dying so close to an election. Will they betray their own word? President Trump has asked for a quick nomination of a new judge. If they do it taking advantage of an absence of rule, this party will be acting against the spirit of respect for the minority.

In many countries, even in the most advanced democracies, the temptation is strong to transform politics into a fight between tribes and clans. In this culture of opposition, the winner allows itself to push the limits of institutions up to the point of breaking the law. We enter into the discussion of populism.

## The Emergence of Populism

The concept of populism covers very distinct social realities. It covers political parties in government like the Viktor Orbán partisans in Hungary, or Five Stars movement in Italy. But it can also describe a social movement like the French *Gilets jaunes* (Yellow Vest) during the year 2018-2019. Many Donald Trump supporters are following the same trend.

All these populist groups have more or less the same character: they refuse to criticise the role of the elite, they criticise the medias, newspapers or television, they denounce equality and deny the impossibility of social mobility. They generally feel excluded from the places of power. They say they represent the people against the elite, the political and economical power, the bottom of society against the top, and they want to regain that power. In order to do so, they would expect the privilege of using the instruments of direct democracy, especially all sorts of referendum. Elections should be banished and representatives of all sorts are not credible to defend them.

All these populist groups speak a lot about the people. But who are these people? Everyone has his or her own notion of people, according to where he or she stands. The extreme right speaks about ethnic groups, the left more about social groups. Political identity is always changing. On the left, one cannot be Marxist anymore, but they build their identity of people on the definition of working class, minorities, immigrants or precarious people. On the right, it might be defined by national or regional identity against other groups.

We have seen in the recent years in Europe a political contagion, a contamination of populist ideas, in Italy, in Hungary, in Poland and certainly in the US behind D. Trump. The themes of national sovereignty, popular will, separation between the elite and the people are spreading all over, questioning more and more the role of the journalists, the intermediate bodies and the system of representation. The happy time of division between left and right is over. The democratic scene is much more complicated. Unconscious feelings are pouring into politics. Temptations to change democratic institutions make its way into the minds leaders, who want to secure power at any cost.

The distinct separation of power is the first victim: the executive branch finds ways to control the judiciary, like in Poland, or to protect important friends who are corrupt. Judges are moved around and controlled. The populist regime works to push the majority of representatives to go by its will. It limits the freedom of journalists by accusing them of being the enemy of the nation. Universities are under scrutiny about their freedom of speech and research. Civil societies are under surveillance, and dissident networks or associations are expelled or closed like the Soros network in Hungary.

We have reached a system which is called illiberal democracy. The people of some countries approve these semi-authoritarian measures by re-electing the populist leaders who engage in this kind of politics. They encourage the elite, muzzle the press and the medias, reject foreign ideas, and reinforce nationalistic feelings. They build on the frustration of the people who see no change in their living conditions while rich people are becoming more affluent.

Thus populism is growing all over, threatening democracy and its spirit and destroying the independence of institutions.

### **Some More Challenges**

The pressure against democratic spirit and institutions is getting stronger and stronger reinforced by various recent evolutions.

One of them and not the least is denial of climate change and all its consequences; biodiversity, pollution, waste and trash, the level of the sea and so on. Climate sceptics are many and in influential places of government in countries like Brazil and the US, putting pressure on democratic decisions which are always difficult to make when the issue at stake finds its solution in the long term. They pave the way for economic benefit of vested interests which could destroy the environment against the will of the people and the building of a long term common good. Democracy has little to say in these issues, which creates more and more tension.

Another area of public controversy is the on-going migration from south to north: in the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, as also across the border between the US and Mexico, thousands of people are trying to get better living conditions by moving out of misery or violence. Some leaders are using these movements to create an atmosphere of violence and blackmail in the name of the defense of identity and local employment. Democratic values and human rights are forgotten in the process.

A third area concerns the relation between religion and politics. Some extremist movements, in Islam allying with Daesh, or in Christianity where some Evangelical groups, are directly involved in political or violent actions. This goes directly against democracy and its rule and spirit, where religion should be neutral and not involved with politics.

### **How to Consolidate Democracy**

We have insisted on the fragility and the threat against democracy and its spirit. It should be clear in the mind of many citizens, even in developed countries, that democracy is fragile. It lies in balances, which are easily broken. In our times of medias and social network, everyone has to be extremely vigilant, even against influences from foreign countries as we have seen in the 2016 US elections. Every citizen is the goalkeeper of that political system.

There are many possible ways to work in favor of democratic values and institutions. The first way is to be very attentive to the perfect maintenance of the democratic institutions. Each country has its own way of building a democracy through diverse institutions, prime minister or not, one or two chambers of representatives, presidential regime or not, democratic monarchy, and so on. These systems, elaborated through centuries of discussions, ought to be respected in all their moves, within the framework of the law. It is important to keep in mind the threshold effect: if a decisive rule is broken, this means that democracy is under attack. The dismissal of a judge, the killing of a journalist, the manipulation of a general election or of a vote in the Parliament are all signs of a danger for democracy. A threshold has been crossed.

The second way of working for democracy is the vigilance over morality in the exercise of politics. All traces of financial corruption, of undue advantages, of blackmail should be reported to justice without delay. The ministry of Justice should pursue these acts and judge them according to the law. No special consideration should be given to the powerful: all are equal before the law. This is easier to say than to do, but the morality in politics and public administration is a key sign of the good health of democracy.

A third area of concern is the good standing and credibility of the press and the medias in general. The quest for truth should be the motto of all media institutions. With the multiplication of fake news and the enormous pressures and tensions in politics, all this linked to difficult financial situations makes for a very difficult situation. All medias must have a strong ethical charter if they want to contribute to the respect of the law and truth. Their work is the way the citizens know what is going on before they make their choice in times of election. But the search for truth is also rewarded: the *New York Times* has never had such a big circulation in all these years.

A special mention about the European Union should be made here. It is the object of a very profound discussion among European citizens. This Union should be explained to every European because of its values and its charter of fundamental rights. This political construction has created peace among countries, which had been at war for centuries. It creates a new sovereignty of working together, which allows for a new solidarity between nations: the coronavirus period has shown more efforts of a financial solidarity. This Union has another dimension: the capacity to remind its different members that they have to respect the rule of law. Brussels reminded Poland and Hungary in the recent years about their duty as far as democracy is concerned. The populist temptation had invaded Eastern Europe and Brussels had the mission to consolidate democracy in these countries.

## **Conclusion**

If the evolution of our European societies pose special challenges to democracy, we know that citizens, all over, can work for its consolidation. It has to be done at the individual level, by networking for solidarity of proximity. This is the basic way to build the spirit of democracy: create a link between each citizen in a concrete, local and personal way. The municipal level is a great challenge for the practice of democracy, although it is not so easy because people know each other and may fight for family and clan power against common good. This level is a good beginning, a great education, and a great experience to learn how to deal with power in cooperation with other actors for the good of the whole community, in the respect of each citizen, especially those who are in great social or personal difficulty. Because of the Gospel and the whole tradition of the Church, Christian people should be in the front line of this fight.

*Original in English*



## Democracy in Chad: Going Backwards

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Chad is a landlocked country located in the heart of Africa, at a latitude of between 8° and 24° degrees North and a longitude of between 13° and 24° East and covers an area of 1 284 000 km<sup>2</sup>. It has borders with Sudan to the East, the Central African Republic and Cameroon to the South, Nigeria and Niger to the West and Libya to the North. This particular location makes Chad a link between the Maghreb and black Africa. Chad is a multi-denominational country and includes more than 150 ethnic groups: about 58% of its inhabitants are Muslims, 18% Catholics and 16% Protestants, while the remaining 8% practise traditional religions.

Chad's socio-political history has long been marked by crises, conflicts and recurrent social tensions. It is often presented as being one of the planet's poorest countries. Almost half the Chadian population (46.7%) lives below the poverty threshold. Chad has a population of 11 039 873 inhabitants of whom 50.6% are women, according to the most recent census of 2009. Like most African countries it was in the 1990s that Chad's democratic process really took off. However, the hope inspired by official declarations and the gradual setting up of democratic institutions soon gave way to disappointment due to the stripping of these institutions of their true substance.

On 4 December 1990, after taking power Idriss Déby announced to the people of Chad: "I bring you neither gold nor silver but democracy".<sup>1</sup> This is how democracy and a multi-party system came to be established in Chad. This period was marked by the creation of several political parties. Three years later, in January 1993, the various actors of both political and public life in Chad gathered at the Sovereign National Conference (CNS), following which a transitional charter was adopted and the Superior Council of Transition (CST) was set up. It was a question then of laying the foundations of a new Republic for the construction of a State of rights and freedoms.

Immediately afterwards a three-year transitional phase was established for the organization of presidential and legislative elections. The first Constitution, adopted in 1996, limited the number of presidential terms of office to two. A few months later, the country's first

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<sup>1</sup> Declaration of Mahamat-Ahmad Alhabo, Secretary General of the Party for Freedom and Development (PLD), 4 October 2016.

presidential election resulted in the victory of President Idriss Déby, followed by legislative elections organized at the beginning of 1997. In accordance with the terms of a concept of “Consensual and participatory democracy” the opposition incorporated a government platform for the common management of affairs and the seat of President of the National Assembly was assigned to the opposition. In 2001, the second presidential election ended in the contested re-election of the outgoing President, Idriss Déby Itno.

### **The Descent into Hell**

Following the example of other African countries, President Idriss Déby modified the Constitution in 2005 by means of a referendum and threw off the straitjacket of the limiting of presidential terms of office. “The Constitution is neither the Bible nor the Qur’an. It is open to modification”, the spokesperson for the Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS) party of President Idriss Déby explained in justification. The political situation deteriorated. In the East of the country new rebel groups were formed in order to overthrow the regime by force.

On 2 and 3 February, 2008, a rebellion of former collaborators and grey eminences of Idriss Déby Itno, supported by Sudan, failed at the gates of the President’s palace in N’Djamena. Opposition leaders were abducted; some are still missing to this day. In the face of the threats looming over his regime, President Idriss Déby changed tactics and decided not only to make a “Peace of the Braves” with Omar al-Bashir, President of Sudan, with whom diplomatic relations had been broken off, but also to use oil resources to equip his army with logistical means and an impressive arsenal of weapons. Nevertheless the political tension in the interior did not slacken and in 2011 ended with the boycotting of the presidential election by the democrat opposition: Idriss Déby won the vote by more than 80% and granted himself a fourth term. In 2016, when he was 64, he embarked on a fifth term of office in a very tense atmosphere.

Unlike the presidential elections, the legislative elections did not experience the same regularity in their organization. Other than the first legislature (1997-2002) which respected the legal period of its term, the renewal of subsequent legislatures suffered a prolonged delay. The second legislature ended its term of office in 2011 (after 9 years instead of 4 years). The current legislature that should have been renewed in 2015 continues to endure following legal manoeuvres which indefinitely prolong its term. The latest postponement puts off the organization of legislative elections until October 2021.

The National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and the National Framework for Political Dialogue (CNDP), the two bodies that are supposed to manage electoral processes, are often accused of being partisans of the party in power since they manipulate or permit to be manipulated the results of the ballot with scant regard for their mission of guaranteeing the legitimacy of these processes. As proof, each presidential ballot is riddled with contention. For several years now the Government of Chad has systematically forbidden or repressed all peaceful demonstrations on public roads. This restriction of civil liberties has cost Chad 2.65 points in the classification of the consortium of media with regard to civil

liberties. Furthermore, the manipulation of elections prepares the ground for continuation in power, quite the opposite of a modern democracy.<sup>2</sup>

The separation of powers, a sacrosanct principle upon which all modern democracies are based and the essential foundation of a State of rights, was the first victim of the constitutional reform of 4 May: the President of the Republic is seizing for himself the powers that ensure him a reign shared with no one. He is the head of government and has extensive powers at his disposal in the legislative domain, while at the same time being President of the Judiciary Council. This new Constitution imposes a denominational oath for accession to the State's senior offices. It imposes a minimum age of 45 years for candidates for the presidential election, while it decrees freedom-curbing laws in abundance.

### **Increasing Failures in Democratization**

Ordinances nos. 45 and 46 and Decrees nos. 193 and 207 of 1962, passed by the freedom-curbing power of that time in order to dissolve parties and ensure the maintenance of order, are still in force: the Minister for Public Security and Immigration makes ample use of them to prohibit every public demonstration, although the right to demonstrate is nevertheless recognized by Article 28 of the Constitution of 4 May 2018. When spontaneous public demonstrations occur they are suppressed by the forces of order with savage brutality, indiscriminate repression and a disproportionate use of force which is often fatal and inflicts injuries. Associations of civil society and the most engaged trade unions are considered as an opposition in disguise: Ordinance no. 23/PR 2018 of 30 July 2018 on the reform of the regime of associations and political parties in Chad reduced their leeway even further.<sup>3</sup>

With the coming of democracy, we witnessed a blossoming of the private press illustrated by the freedom of its tone. It truly played the role of a counter-power, despite the threats which hung over it. Long admired for their contribution to reinforcing democracy and classed among the frontrunners in Africa, the independent Chad media are today struggling to retain these gains. The High Authority for Audiovisual Media (HAMA), established by the Fourth Republic to replace the High Council of Communications (HCC) and supposed to regulate the exercise of the profession, sometimes sets itself up as a court of inquisition against the media. Arrests of journalists and the closing down of press organs are becoming current practice. The freedom of the press has never been so threatened. Frequent cuts in internet connections, violations of freedom of expression, of access to information and of private life, as well as the systematic blocking of the internet and social networks, hinder the freedom of the press and of communications.

### **The Church and Democracy**

In her main pastoral responsibility for caring for the salvation of souls and saving the bodies that shelter them, the Church has more than once been led to raise her voice in the name of

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<sup>2</sup> *Tchad et Culture* no. 376, April 2019, pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Ardit, C. (1993). "Tchad : chronique d'une démocratie importée", *Journal des anthropologues*. Number 53-55, pp. 147-153.

the people whose joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties she shares in daily life. In special circumstances the Catholic Church publishes declarations through the Episcopal Conference of Chad. An example of this is the declaration of 26 April 2006, published after the assault of 13 April 2006 on the country's capital by an armed rebellion, which almost plunged Chad once again into the infernal circle of war. Bishop Jean-Claude Bouchard, then President of the Episcopal Conference of Chad, declared during a visit to Rome in 2006: "We have launched an appeal for dialogue, to the Government and to all opposing parties, excluding no-one, so that they seriously knuckle down to resolving the evils that are spreading gangrene in the country rather than merely plastering them over with elections".<sup>4</sup>

The Church's commitment to determine herself in relation to the State is further affirmed in the Christmas messages drawn up by the Episcopal Conference of Chad. "Every year, for Christmas, we publish a 'message' on a theme which has to do with the country's social, economic, political and religious situation. These messages are nourished by the Word of God but are addressed to all people of good will and are read with great interest, doubtless for different reasons, by one and all, including all ethnic groups and religions".<sup>5</sup> So it is that in the positions she takes the Church has not ceased to appeal to political leaders, reminding them of their priority to put the common good first. Several senior officials who refused to take the denominational oath were relieved of their offices. In a declaration of January 2019, Metropolitan Archbishop Edmond Djitangar Goetbé of N'Djamena affirmed: "The loyalty of Christians is not guaranteed by a human oath even if it is garbed in religion, but rather by its loyalty in service, its honesty and a sense of the common good. *If we do not trust Christians, because they are Christians, that's one thing; but if we confer responsibilities, it is in respecting their conscience that they must manage this responsibility*".

The Church of Chad has created a "Justice and Peace" Commission which exists in the parishes, in the dioceses and at the national level. This Commission ensures the formation of Christians in justice and in peace, which are basic Gospel values and meet a great need. It likewise trains Christians for the observation of elections in Chad. However, this Commission's work still remains very modest not only because of the lack of skill and organization of its members, their fear of the authorities and the pressure of the social milieu, but also because of grave failings in the judicial apparatus, as Bishop Jean Claude Bouchard deplores.<sup>6</sup>

The Catholic Church plays an essential role "in a society which also claims to construct itself politically without taking seriously in its functioning people's most elementary rights, such as the rights to safety, justice, health care and education. This degradation of society's moral sense strongly calls us into question – us, the Bishops of Chad – and appears to us henceforth to be a permanent challenge that we must face. Thus it is thanks to the Gospel and to the Church's social teaching that we make ourselves the voice of the "voiceless" and of those whom we call "civil society", on which much depends today – starting with the international

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<sup>4</sup> "Les défis actuels de l'Église au Tchad et en Afrique". *La Croix*. no. 2370. 16 April 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

institutions (which however play no small part in the flourishing of corruption) – in order to defend human rights and to combat bad governance”.<sup>7</sup>

It is mainly the task of lay people to take an active and direct part in political life, hence the need to give them a sound formation in both the spiritual life and the Church’s social teaching so that the Christian virtues may guide their social and political actions. As Pope Benedict affirms, “Through her lay members, the Church is present and active in the world. Lay people have an important role to play in the Church and in society”.<sup>8</sup> To accompany the electoral process in Chad where elections have always been contested, lay Chadians have a great challenge to face. The various commissions of “Justice and Peace”, very active in the formation of Christians for an enlightened participation in public life and in the construction of the common good, must see to managing and accompanying lay people so that they are able to mobilize themselves in political parties and in civil society. It is crucial that lay people be trained in civil education and equipped for processes of the proper functioning of elections and respect for result of the ballot. For “the elections are a place where a people’s political choice is expressed and are a sign of legitimacy for the exercise of power”.<sup>9</sup>

This work would effectively contribute to breaking with every non-democratic regime which seeks to generate political indifference or resignation among the population, or even a generalized lack of respect for the common good. Benedict XVI affirms, moreover, that “Given the chronic poverty of its people, who suffer the effects of exploitation and embezzlement of funds both locally and abroad, the opulence of certain groups shocks the human conscience [...] the Church must speak out against the unjust order that prevents the peoples of Africa from consolidating their economies”.<sup>10</sup> This declaration is a particular call to the Chadian laity. Archbishop Edmond Djitangar Goetbé likewise said that “in the debates of society on the great political and social issues, we would have liked to see the clergy’s journal, *A l’écoute de la RESRAT*, take more positions in order to express the voice of the local clergy as a complement to those of the bishops and of Chadian lay people, as we see it under foreign skies”.<sup>11</sup>

With regard to the facts, the concept of democracy has been emptied of its values which among other things are respect for the electors’ choice and for the fundamental human rights, political alternation and good government. According to the 2019 classification of the consortium of media carried out by *The Economist*, Chad has a disastrous score among the authoritarian regimes.

Original French  
Translation Catherine Marceline Rice

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ludovic L. (2012). “Le rôle public de l’Église catholique en Afrique”, *Études*, vol. 417, no. 9, pp. 163-174.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *Tchad et Culture*. no. 383. January 2020.



## Diminishing Democracy in Africa: Engaging Youth to Turn its Course

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### Democracy: The Present African Scenario

The story of democracy in modern African nations begins with colonialism and then independence in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, the 1990s was seen as the “second liberation” in Africa due to the rapid democratisation process, with a series of multi-party elections in many African countries. It was considered a time for sanitising democracy after the one party or military regimes that had emerged in the decades after independence. Before this, only Botswana, Mauritius and Senegal continued holding multiparty elections since independence, and no African leader had ever lost an election or handed-over power (Dowden, 1993). It became an epoch of hope with a “new breed” of African leaders like Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia, Isias Aferworki in Eritrea, and Paul Kagame in Rwanda, among others, willing to break their discredited predecessors’ taboos and reshape the discourse on democracy in Africa. Now, it is becoming increasingly clear that this group and many others, who had been seen as bastions of hope for democracy in Africa, are beginning to look more and more like scions of the old breed (Oloka-Onyango, 2004).

The state of democracy in Africa can best be termed as a mixed-bag scenario, with snails-pace progress amidst disappointing scenes of increasing elected dictatorships and rising authoritarianism. Recurring issues of leaders seeking to evade term limits, armed conflicts for power, and the increasingly overt efforts by external actors to shape outcomes (Siegle & Cook, 2020), continue to dominate Africa’s political landscape. Of all the fifty-four African countries: only 3 are currently considered as liberal democracies; 18 are categorised as electoral democracies; 26 are electoral autocracies; and 7 are closed autocracies (Luhmann & Lindberg, 2018). Though this could suggest democratic difficulties rather than democratic collapse, it is also striking that every criterion of democracy in terms of “political and social integration” – recorded a decline. There is increasing media censorship, intimidation of civil society groups, absence of impartial electoral commissions, and use of the security forces for political ends. This has undermined the potential for new forms of accountability (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018).

Interestingly, almost all African states now hold “democratic” multiparty elections, but constitutions confer disproportionate power on the president and ruling party or elite group.

Some “democratic” governments such as in Burundi and Uganda have been deploying repression to deal with the challenges of dissent arising from social media and the emergence of increasingly assertive civil society groups and opposition parties (Cheeseman N. , 2019). There is also narrow range of civil liberties and low levels of popular involvement (except at election times). Holding an election is a milestone, but it is not the key to Africa’s democratic legitimacy, as many elections in the Africa have failed to meet the internationally accepted standards for free and fair elections (Teshome, 2008).

Akhaine (2015), like many others, considers external interference in thwarting democracy in Africa through economic interests and outright military action to instate and protect foreign economic and strategic interests of countries and the multilateral organisations. Even democracy flag-bearers like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank that push the democracy agenda through their aid conditionalities, are not interested in its benefits for the citizens of Africa. This creates a situation of the dictatorship of the international organisations, working with the local elites who have usurped the leadership of their countries as comprador bourgeoisie. They use this alliance, plus tribal base to get their legitimacy, while also relying on disinformation to the masses and militarisation to cling to power.

Political exclusion is undermining the relevance of democratic rights and freedoms. There exist political, social and economic competition, leading to inequalities with benefits for minorities over the majorities in society. Key among these is the issue of political inclusion and equal access to power of women and youth (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2017), which many democracies (and autocracies) in Africa fail to diligently execute. Rwanda and Tanzania stand out as over-performers in gender inclusiveness in Africa, a plus on their otherwise questionable democratic progress (Luhmann & Lindberg, 2018). The meaningful inclusion of the youth in the democratization process still remains a farfetched dream.

There is also evidence to show that apart from poverty and conflict, millions of refugees or forced migrants from Africa are fleeing authoritarian rule, manifested in political repression and lack of democratic liberties. Eritrea and the Gambia, among other African countries, have irregular migrants reaching the shores of Europe due to unpredictable, autocratic regimes at home. The choice of destination countries further confirms that democracy is a factor in forced or irregular migration (Roynance, 2015). It is therefore agreeable that migration is a response to the political conditions in both countries of origin and destination with the former revealing democracy push factors and the latter offering democracy pull factors. A country’s political regime, whether authoritarian or democratic, is bound to impact net wellbeing of its citizens, due to appropriate government response or lack thereof, Thus boosting the willingness to migrate (Adsera, Boix, Guzi, & Pytlikova, 2016).

The foregoing observation raises the key question: How is democracy in Africa today? A bird’s eye-view, and more critical assessment reveal that Africa does not fare well in terms of democracy. The gloom is only redeemed by some limited progress: there are now fifty-five democratically retired heads of state from seventeen countries by 2020 as compared to eleven by 2001 - representing about 60 percent of the African population (Stith, 2020). This is

contrasted by the fact that the majority of the African countries do not enjoy this. Comparatively, West and Southern Africa consistently perform better than East, Central and North Africa in terms of democratic indicators. Between 2015 and 2017 Africa witnessed an overall deterioration in the quality of political transformation and governance (Cheeseman N. , 2019). Even in Ghana, Tanzania, and others considered to be on the path towards stable democracy, the process of consolidation is still a long one (Siegle & Cook, 2020). However, it can be argued that African countries are inching their way towards democracy and the current manifestations are part of the process.

### **Democracy: What is it?**

The word “democracy” is believed to have originated from the Greek words *demos* “people” and *kratos* “power” or “rule”, to form the Greek word *demokratia* (rule of the people) (Lindell & Scott, 1999). The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines democracy as a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them through a system of representation, and periodically held free elections.<sup>1</sup> Consensus on the definition of democracy is becoming difficult, as democracy interpreted differently by different parties (Baviskar & Malone, 2004) (Ottemoeller, Marcus, & Mease, 2001); (Luhmann & Lindberg, 2018). These different perspectives influence the quality and way democracy is practiced.

Notwithstanding the lack of consensus or even outright distaste for democracy, it still remains the most favourable form of government. Democracy has a positive connotation throughout most of the world-so much so that even some political systems with little or no rule by the people are called democratic. Principally, democracy offers all citizens political, economic and social entitlements in the form of rights, equality, recognition and primacy, in the context of majority rule. It offers citizens a fair standard of living, equal opportunities based on ability, while ensuring proper use of public resources for the common good, not private interests. Equal treatment in democracy goes beyond the bounds of class, caste, creed, birth, religion, language or wealth. It promotes social justice and the dignity of the human person (Bawa, n.d), stressing a key principle of the involvement of the citizens. Democracy also implies that there is a social contract between those governing and those being governed, resulting in consensus that accommodates the interests of the majority citizens.

### **The Youth: Africa’s Hope for Better Democracy?**

Africa has the world’s youngest population and it is growing rapidly (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2017). Young people from 0-14 years formed 41 per cent (about 473.7 million) and those in the age bracket 15-24 years formed 19 per cent (226 million) of Africa’s estimated 1.203 billion people by 2016 (African Union, 2017). With the youth bulge, which is expected to result into demographic dividends, Africa also has the potential of a democratic dividend as the young people form a political force, labour force and votes (Gavin, 2007). Their participation in politics is also an opportunity for “social navigation” (Vigh, 2006), enabling them to construct meaningful outlooks for democracy within an unpredictable and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy>

constantly changing socio-political terrain. The Arab Spring and other political contestation events led or joined by young people in Burkina Faso, Senegal, Niger, Togo and South Africa, demonstrate the democratic potential of Africa's young people. The involvement of the young people in political activity, and the democratisation process in Africa dates back to independence struggles (Gyampo & Anyidoho, 2019). Young nationalists such as Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikiwe, Guinea's Sékou Touré, Mali's Modibo Keita and Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, among others, led their fellows to resist colonial rule, often preferring different strategies to older nationalists (Awoonor, 1990).

In the more recent times, Africa is seeing a crop of young politicians emerging from various countries and ready to challenge the misrule that has plagued their countries. However, the capacity and willingness of young people to engage in politics and the impact of their engagement is affected by age, education, income, and location. Young people who have low incomes, lack decent or full employment, have little education, and live in rural areas tend to be more marginalised from formal political processes (Peters, Richards, & Vlassenroot, 2003), thus curtailing their contribution to democratisation.

Similar to Africa's democracy image, the impact of young people as agents of democratic change and hope for the future of African countries, is affected by disinterest, disenchantment and disempowerment (Anyidoho, et al., 2012), further increasing their exclusion and vulnerability (Abbink, 2005). Worse still, young people's political activity has often been both circumscribed and co-opted by others, as in the Arab Spring in North Africa. On the contrary, young people are recruited to "fight dangerous political wars" (Ahwoi, 2008), often as "foot-soldiers" of political parties (Bob-Milliar, 2014). Many of them see these as avenues to the jobs, money and social capital (Honwana, 2012), making them appear as "political entrepreneurs" (Jeffrey, 2010). Endemic poverty and chronic unemployment resulting from failed neoliberal economic policies, bad governance, and political crises, make the young people seek quick survival means as they "wait" for their turn (Honwana, 2012). The participation of young women has even been hindered more by the gendered roles socialisation and male dominance of resources and public spaces (Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2011), a situation that is just beginning to improve (Tripp & Badri, 2017).

It is also possible that these realities of poverty and unemployment may become a catalyst for young people's political participation (Masquelier, 2013) and contribution to democracy. Cultural and religious dynamics, also do influence young people's engagement in political action and the democratisation process (Gyampo & Anyidoho, 2019). Consequently, there is a call, from individuals and bodies, for meaningful engagement of the young people as partners in politics and in development (Delgado, 2002). Such a call also extends to partners like the Church, to offer guidance and accompaniment for these budding leaders and actors seeking to influence change in Africa's democratisation process.

### **Education as an Anchor for Democracy**

Education is a fundamental link to developing democracy. In a democracy, education is given primacy, for it is a pre-requisite for the survival and success of the former, by fostering a democratic temper in the minds of people. Democracy has to be introduced from the very

beginning of education and its values need to be practiced in educational institutions, if it is to become a reality and way of life. Education must be democratically oriented so as to develop the basic qualities of character, which are essential for the functioning of democratic life. These qualities of a passion for social justice, a quickening of social conscience and a tolerance of intellectual and cultural differences in others, will help develop critical intelligence in students, cultivate love for work and instill a deep sense of patriotism. This makes education the great instrument of social emancipation, by which democracy establishes, maintains and protects the spirit of equality among its members (Bawa, n.d).

Thinkers like John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill and John Dewey have emphasised the role of education in democracy in different ways. John Dewey succinctly states that: "The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. A government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who govern and obey their governors are educated. Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education" (Dewey, 2005, p. 1198).

Education has another value in helping individuals to examine their lives, decisions and practices in order to develop convictions to live by. This approach to education helps in laying a foundation for young people to critically examine or reflect. This helps them develop: self-knowledge and discipline, attentiveness to own and others' experience, trust in God's direction in life and respect for intellect and reason as tools for discovering truth, skill in discerning the right course of action, use of talents and knowledge to help others, flexibility and pragmatism in problem solving, large-hearted ambition, and a desire to find God in all things. In summary, these qualities can help the young learners to be attentive, reflective and loving (Appleyard, n.d). Adopting this value-based pedagogy for the education of the young people will help refine their political, economic and social views that become the basis of meaningful democratic principles.

### *The Role of School*

The role of the school in empowering young people for democracy starts with being littered with democratic principles. It should create the democratic environment, which is congenial for the full-flowering of human personality (Bawa, n.d). Stressing the role of the environment in education and by extension, democracy, Dewey observes that sometimes, education occurs indirectly through the environment and thus urges that there is need to design the environment and deliberately regulate it to have the desired educative effect. Schools, therefore, have a special position as the environments framed with express reference to influencing the mental and moral position of their members (Dewey, 2005).

The school should also act as a replica of community where democratic ideals are not only taught theoretically but should be practiced through its multifarious activities. Quoting Ross, Bhawna writes, "Schools ought to stress the duties and responsibilities of individual citizens. They ought to train pupils in a spirit of cheerful willing and effective service. They should teach citizenship directly. Everywhere there should be a spirit of teamwork. School is a

prepared environment in which child may best blossom". Classroom teachers and schools have a responsibility to nurture character as well as teach knowledge and skills (Bawa, n.d).

### *The Role of the Church*

For the Church, democracy emanates from the Gospel with values such as liberty and equality, which the church has helped to promote, based on the shared commons of: origin, dignity and destiny (DeTorre, 1997). Guided by these, the Church has also prominently defended human rights, as Pope John XXIII stressed in his 1963 Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*:

"Any human society, if it is to be well ordered and productive, must lay down as a foundation this principle, namely, that every human being is a person, that is, his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will... By virtue of this, he has rights and duties of his own, flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature, which are therefore universal, inviolable and inalienable."

This becomes a new call for the Church and its agents to engage in advocating democracy for with a renewed fervor, especially in these times, when democracy is being replaced by autocracy. The Church's old tradition of value-laden education and youth apostolate should be revived, to save democracy and consequently human persons.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, the current trajectory of democracy in Africa can be best termed as limited. Hope seems to disappear in the labyrinth of undesirable repression and authoritarianism. For democracy, the participation of the young people is crucial. However, their systematic marginalisation, limits their participation to being agents and purveyors of political conflict and violence. This is bad for the development of more democracy in Africa. Cultural factors and greed have created a situation in which young people are being blamed for their political exclusion, attributed to lack of interest. Enclaves of young people's political activism and their growing sense of democracy, point to their aversion for political vices like corruption and repression. The potential in Africa's young people for improving the quality of democracy and increasing the pace of democratisation is great. They have the numbers and incentives. But their capacity should be developed through meaningful education, lest they follow the path already trodden by the old and current leaders. The Church and other partners should increase their efforts to contribute to this, as the current leaders in Africa are more inclined to perpetuating their rules than forge a better democracy in their countries.

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*Original in English*



## Is Democracy in Crisis? Towards A Substantive Democracy

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### Introduction

The socio-political context of the post-industrial societies seems to rhyme with an anti-democracy. In fact, for a number of authors such as Ronald Inglehart (1977), (Chagnollaud, 2010, pp. 203-205) Martine Barthélémy (2000), Samuel Barnes and Max Kaase (1979), the citizens' lack of interest in democratic practises (the vote, partisan militancy, etc.) is explained by the change in values, which is taking place in the post-industrial societies. They are passing from materialist values linked to material aspects of well-being and to the security of life, to post-materialist values giving pride of place rather to individuals, to their identity and personal well-being, in short, to their quality of life.

This change has been made possible not only thanks to the development of education, technical innovation and economic growth which favour among other things an improvement in living standards, but also by the recognition and promotion of individual rights. Pierre de Lauzan describes these changes as the emergence of a 'new anthropology' characterized by "a recognition of human beings' dignity, trust in their freedom and in their autonomy of choice, greater tolerance, more equal opportunities, etc." (2011, p. 95)

These socio-cultural changes are not without consequence for politics in general and for democracy in particular. For the promotion of the individual values is made in opposition to the traditional sources of authority (1999, p. 226). Anthony Giddens describes this situation of the institutionalisation of radical doubt, so that henceforth all sources of authority are contested (1991, p. 3). In this context the State, the political parties and other representative institutions assuring the mediation of the authorities are likewise contested if not fallen into disuse. Today what seems to be promoted are the political forms of direct participation such as the new social movements, special interest groups, etc. – new actors whose identity and actions seem far from being able to reassure either the functioning of the game and of 'traditional' democratic institutions or the thinkers of democracy.

From this point, we may ask ourselves whether democracy will survive in the context of the post-materialist societies. If the question is legitimate, its answers are far from achieving unanimity among political analysts. In a dialectic approach we shall show that for some democracy is threatened (1), while for others, on the contrary, it shows signs of vitality (2). We shall conclude by showing that democracy, rather, is in transformation in both its

conception and in the practices of it, and consequently its evaluation must henceforth integrate new elements once again (3).

### **The Loss of Interest in Institutions and Democratic Practices**

Democracy is placed in a difficult position in our contemporary societies by growing cynicism in the area of institutions, governments and the political elites. This cynicism is the work of those whom Pippa Norris has called '*critical citizens*' (1999) or what Pierre Rosanvallon has called 'the people judge' (2006, pp. 22, 199-255). These are the kind of citizens who have a greater need for transparency. This explains, in part, the decline of support for the political elites who pass 'transparency tests' regarding management with difficulty. Indeed during the past two decades several 'men of state' have been dismissed because of an uninterrupted succession of scandals (Castells, 1999, pp. 401-412). Scandal has become a powerful weapon which citizens, special interest groups and above all the media use against the political elites, which has ended by discrediting them (Castells, 1999, p. 401) (Norris P. , 2011, pp. 169-187). Empirical and statistical studies (Dalton R. , pp. 62-66) confirm the drastic reduction of the citizens' confidence in the political elites whom they consider unable to represent them adequately. Actually, apart from scandals, the political elites barely escape from the iron law of oligarchy (Larry & Gunther, 2001, p. xii). In this context to many people representative democracy seems no longer to be so much a regime founded on the sovereignty of the people as rather a type of organization which gives power to the elite.

Democratic governments enjoy no better support than the political elites. Already in 1975 M. Crozier, S. Huntington and J. Watanuki were referring to a 'crisis of democracies' in the West which was essentially expressed by the inability of states and governments to face all the social demands that were being conveyed to them. This gave rise to a further calling into question of their functional legitimacy (Crozier, Huntington, & Watanuki, 1975). Russell Dalton (2005), Pippa Norris (1999, pp. 66-69), (2011, pp. 104-107), Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam (2000, pp. 52-73) have shown by empirical and quantitative studies how support to democratic institutions is declining in all the industrialized countries, at least since the 1980s.

Political parties seem to be the most threatened of the democratic institutions. They adapt with difficulty if not very slowly to the social and cultural changes which have occurred in contemporary societies. Political parties see their role of mediation between citizens dwindling. They are increasingly losing their political functions of information and education of citizens to mass media. For most citizens in contemporary societies enjoy a sufficiently high level of education to enable them to gain access to information by themselves in order to choose their sources of political information. From this point they often have recourse to mass media, including the internet, in order to acquire information and to form an opinion for themselves on political questions and issues. This does not necessarily mean that citizens are better informed politically than they were in the past (Norris P. , 2011, pp. 142-168)<sup>1</sup>. For, as

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<sup>1</sup> An inquiry made in several post-industrial societies in order to assess the citizens' knowledge of democracy revealed that the level of their knowledge of democracy was average and not necessarily satisfactory.

Pascal Perrineau rightly notes, “multiplying sources of information does not increase individuals’ cognitive capacities” (2003, p. 260).

Be that as it may, the parties are losing part of their influence over citizens, which is prejudicial to democratic participation (Dalton, Wattenberg, & (eds), 2000, p. 10). Likewise other functions (Larry & Gunther, 2001, p. xiv), (Dalton, Wattenberg, & (eds), 2000, pp. 5-10) ‘traditionally’ attributed to political parties, such as the mobilisation of electors, the structuring of the selection of candidates in relation to political issues, the representation of different social groups, the aggregation of particular interests in the government’s political programme, etc., are henceforth shared by other actors and especially by social movements, by the organisations of social movements, and above all by special interest groups. On the one hand, this leads to calling into question the primacy of political parties as bodies aggregating the citizens’ preferences, and on the other, to electoral fidelities. They are now becoming “parties without partisans”, title of the work by Dalton and Wattenberg. A large proportion of the rare citizens who are still officially affiliated to parties settle for what Putnam has described as “participation based on the cheque book” (2000, p. 40).

Lastly, it is the function of the traditional democratic system which is called into question by the emergence of a contentious politics which by nature is “episodic rather than continuous, takes place in public, implies an interaction between claimants and others, is recognised by these others as weighing on their interests and engages the government as mediator, target or claimant” (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996, p. 5). Contentious politics whose principle agents are social movements<sup>2</sup> project into the public space claims of a radical, utopian and identity character, calling into question the status and hierarchical foundations that lie at the root of the functioning of the traditional democratic system.

### **Citizens’ Attachment to democratic Principles and to Democratic Communities**

Optimistic theses on the vigour of democracy and its future in contemporary societies essentially rely on a reconceptualization of political support. The work *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government* by Pippa Norris and her co-authors is at the best illustration of this. Their effort of reconceptualization finds support in the works of David Easton who distinguishes three dimensions of the concept of ‘political support’, (Easton, 1965), (Norris P. (., 1999, p. 9) namely, support for the political community (national pride, patriotism), support for the type of regime (democratic, dictatorial, etc.), and support for the political authorities

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<sup>2</sup> A social movement is a concerted collective action whose dynamic rests on a vision (interpretation) of society or on a specific reality with a determination to pose a type of action with a view to defending a cause. In this sense it is a contentious enterprise. Ontologically, a social movement cannot be reduced to an actor or an organization. It is a network of interactions between various types of actors such as citizens, special interest groups, institutions, businesses, political parties, etc. Unlike other organizations which defend causes, social movements have a weak level of institutionalization. See Sommier, Isabelle, *Le renouveau des mouvements sociaux contestataires*. Paris: Flammarion, 2000; Neveu, E., *Sociologie des mouvements sociaux*, Paris: La Découverte, 2005; McAdam, D., J. D. McCarthy and M. N. Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements. Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; Della Porta, D. and S. Tarrow (eds.), *Transnational Protest & Global Activism*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

(political elites). Norris *et al.* take up Easton's ideas while elaborating them further and distinguish five dimensions of the concept of political support: 1) for the political community, 2) for the principles of the political regime, 3) for the performance of the regime, 4) for the institutions of the regime, and 5) for the political authorities. The breaking down of the concept of 'political support' into five dimensions permits a better diagnosis of the democratic malaise. Norris and her co-authors have shown by comparative quantitative analyses that democracy as a type of political regime enjoys significant support from populations who prefer it to every other form of regime. (1999, p. 43) In addition, in all democratic countries, the populations show their pleasure at belonging to a democratic national political community (1999, pp. 41-42). For Norris and her co-authors sources of dissatisfaction are rather political institutions (parties, governments, national assemblies, etc.), political authorities (governments, leaders of political parties, etc.), as well as the functioning and performance of democratic governments today. But this dissatisfaction is rather a sign of vitality and of renewed interest in democratic principles. Citizens disapprove of the fact that the democratic ideal is not put into practice. Thus 'critical citizens' would not be anti-democrats but 'dissatisfied democrats'.

As for the socio-cultural context of contemporary societies that would be unfavourable to democracy, Ronald Inglehart disputes the idea that post-materialist values are anti-democratic. For him, post-modernization erodes authority but increases support for democracy as a type of regime (1999, p. 236). We agree with him that the contentious politics of social movements have converged, in spite of everything, in more ways than one with those of participatory and substantive democracy. We may think of demands related to the introduction of new values and of new themes in the public space with reference to gender, to the body, to healthcare, to the environment, to the recognition of the ethnic and cultural differences brought by the new social movements.

"Politics in the age of defiance" of sources of authority such as the state and the political parties is not anti-democratic. For 'individuals' are more than ever disposed to burst into the public space even if it is in the name of their personal interests. The increased presence of social actors in the public space has made it possible in various respects to draw the attention of public opinion to social injustices, which had previously been ignored or neglected. We have consequently been able to grasp the increased importance of diversity and social and cultural pluralism as things that play a part in the idea of democracy.

### **Conclusion: we are witnessing a transformation of democracy and its practices**

The authors who defend theses on the vitality of democracy have clearly shown that today's societies are still strongly attached to the democratic ideal and by far prefer a democratic regime to any other type of political regime. They also show their pride in belonging to a democratic community. However, to what extent would the crisis of political institutions, the loss of trust in political leaders as well as the dysfunctions of democratic governments spare the democratic ideal and principles?

Dismissing the theses of the decline and vitality of democracy in contemporary societies, we pose the hypothesis that a malaise exists in democracy, indeed a need for the transformation

and adaptation of democracy to the socio-cultural changes that have taken place in postmodernity. In concrete terms it is right to rethink on the one hand democracy through its system of representation and participation, and on the other, the actions of new actors such as the organizations of civil society, organized through a process of institutionalization and constitutionalization in order to facilitate their interactions in the political and democratic system.

As we have shown, special interest groups ensure or claim to ensure a form of representation of the interests of their members. It is therefore important that the political representation is now enlarged beyond partisan representation in order to include associative representation.

The same applies to democratic participation which should no longer be limited to political parties and which must henceforth integrate associative participation almost on a daily basis. In fact the participation of organizations of civil society in politics challenges the idea that political participation should be limited to partisan electoral participation in order that, once they are elected, political leaders have their hands free to initiate the policies of their choice without interference from citizens (Schumpeter, 1990), (Huntington, 1968). The involvement of citizens in political life through associations orientates them rather towards a substantive democracy with a larger and more regular civic participation. This form of democratic participation "is practised on a daily basis and in numerous ways: by lobbying for or against the decisions of public bodies, by means of a whole range of organizations, by holding referendums and even by assuming functions and roles that were once thought to be the exclusive responsibility of a central government" (Suleiman, 2003, p. 380).

However this broadening of substantive democracy would only have meaning if in parallel the new actors in the public space engaged in a process of institutionalization at the organizational level and of constitutionalization at the regulatory level. For if politics and especially democracy consist of recognition of the diversity of the actors and integration of their differences on the basis of temporary compromises, it is important that these new actors should obey a certain management. The trade unions for example, which are former special interest groups, are better institutionalized, which makes them more responsible in the management of their members, but also in the respect of democratic rules. The new groups must therefore inscribe their actions in a legal or at least legitimate framework, in order to secure for their actions in the public space a certain transparency. Since democracy is also a state of rights it would not be in opposition to democratic practice to produce laws and regulations in order to manage as best as possible the uncertainty of group interventions in the public space.

More fundamentally it is politics itself that we must rethink. The 'critical citizen' of Norris or 'the people judge' of P. Rosanvallon (2006) are perhaps in quest of another political ideal. For in the last analysis it is a historically dated type of political organisation that is involved. It has long been inconceivable to think of politics outside the state, its institutions and its territory controlled by means of a combination of frontiers and normative instruments. It is time to rediscover a different kind of politics.

To sum up, if amid the expansion of political rights the emergence of a substantive democracy seems to upset the functioning of a procedural democracy, there is no need to fear for the survival of democracy itself. The new social movements, special interest groups and, more broadly, organized civil society are showing undeniable signs of renewing the political forces at the heart of democratic regimes.

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## Defending Democracy and Decrying Authoritarianism - The Indian Crucible

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### Indian Constitution and Centrality of Democracy

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar the architect of Indian Constitution succinctly pointed to the features of democracy. "Political Democracy rests on four premises which may be set out in the following terms: i) The Individual is an end in himself; ii) That the individual has certain inalienable rights which must be guaranteed to him by the Constitution; iii) That the individual shall not be required to relinquish any of his constitutional rights as a condition precedent to the receipt of a privilege; iv) that the State shall not delegate powers to private persons to govern others". Against many who opposed him while drafting the Constitution of India, he stuck to these democratic principles and ensured their being an integral part of the Constitution.

But today citizens of India are fundamentally affected by the destruction of democracy and secularism of this country. There is total gloom and depression among the common masses and concerned citizens seeing the rulers engaged in falsehood and mythification of progress while the vast majority of the population is facing starvation and death; aggressive and undemocratic pursuit of politics on the basis of religious majoritarianism; and dividing the populace in the name of caste, class, region, religion, language and political affiliation.

On one hand, the country seems to be distancing itself from age-old practice of non-violence, communal harmony, peaceful coexistence, respect for different cultural practices, economic prosperity for all, owning a common destiny as Indians, adhering to constitutional principles of democracy, secularism, socialism, etc. On the other hand, there is planned and programmed violence against the Dalits, Tribals, most backward castes, minorities, children and women from these communities. Those in power or those close to them take law into their own hands creating a culture of violence as an accepted norm of Indian polity. Not just cultural policing but even food habits of Indians is to be decided and determined by some miscreants. Instead of objecting to crime, there is glorifying through selfies and celebrations; even cricket matches are used to project a war like scenario and instill a wrong sense of nationalism by projecting 'the enemy other', etc. In all these, the casualty is democracy and the masses who are badly in need of a democratic form of government.

## **Authoritarian Regimes Denigrating Democracy**

In the words of Tom Hollo, “This fact is suddenly becoming terrifyingly apparent to many more people. Right now, democracy is under attack and authoritarianism on the rise, in a process inextricably interwoven with the ecological crisis, ballooning inequality, and rising hate. The suppression and criminalisation of protest and advocacy, prosecution of whistle blowers and raiding of media organisations, and corporate capture of political parties and regulatory processes, are just the tip of the iceberg. Those of us working for social change of all kinds are finding that our efforts, which have always been met with resistance from those in power, are increasingly able to be ignored by decision-makers embedded in systems which are ever harder to dignify with the name democracy”.

Tim Hollo’s understanding of the devaluation and destruction of democracy is totally apt for India. Irrespective of many drawbacks in the living out of democratic principles in India over the last 60 years, there were attempts to practice it. But in the last 10 years, there has been total disregard for democratic principles and practices. There are systematic efforts to strengthen the age old oppressive caste system; bring back the exploitative feudal system; relegate women to hearth and home by re-establishing patriarchy; engaging in hate speech and thus create fear and terror among the minorities; open up economic opportunities for the corporates and deny even daily wages for the labouring class; do away with all the national institutions which are supposed to uphold constitutional values and make them stooges of the political regime; throwaway fulfilling government obligations and much less follow the principles of good governance; project lies and myths as real and thus hoodwink the middle class; use money power, muscle power and mind power and win elections and form governments; pretend to be a global power while not providing leadership and good governance in times of crisis.

The 178 Oxfam Briefing Paper, 2014 in its document titled, “Working for the Few: Political capture and economic inequality” captured the nexus between autocratic political power and steep economic growth of a few. The document went on to highlight this disturbing fact that when wealth captures government policymaking, the rules bend to favor the rich, often to the detriment of everyone else. The consequences include the erosion of democratic governance, the pulling apart of social cohesion, and the vanishing of equal opportunities for all, widening of the gap between rich and poor, men and women.

## **Political Economy of Authoritarianism and Populism in India**

The above stated understanding of the nexus between autocratic political power and steep economic growth of a few is totally applicable to India today. Mukesh Ambani one of the plutocrats of India has been growing economically powerful not only in India but internationally. Today he is the 8<sup>th</sup> richest in the world. Economic Times reported that Reliance Industries Limited raised over Rs. 2 trillion (\$ 27 billion) in the last few months via strategic investments. Similarly, Gautam Adani who was a small time contractor now has emerged as one of the richest persons in India. NDTV reported that Adani Green will invest Rs. 450 billion (\$ 6 billion) to build mega solar project in India.

While corporate magnets like Ambani and Adani are reaping unprecedented wealth in this time of pandemic, over two third of Indians are forced to starve and die. Before the Covid-19, it was reported that two thirds of people in India live in absolute poverty, that is, 68.8% of the population lived on less than \$2 a day, that is, around Rs. 130 Over 30% have even less than \$1.25 per day, that is, Rs. 100.

Janashakti, a Karnataka-based civil society organisation in its report after undertaking a survey of 1,387 workers across sectors and members of marginalised groups in the state, found that an overwhelming 82% did not have money to buy essential food items and run their houses. Almost three-quarters of the farmers among the respondents said they could not sell their produce, and among those that did manage to sell it off, nearly four-fifths incurred serious losses. More than half of the respondents stated that they were not able to access any government relief during the lockdown period. While the business houses of India take huge amount of loans from banks and run away from the country with the support of politicians and police, the common masses cannot take any loan without security for agricultural purposes. They do not get any credit from the government either. Thus, they are forced to remain in utter poverty.

Indian politicians over the years, during independence day and republic day celebrations pay lip service to upholding constitutional values. But the minorities and weaker sections are there to be oppressed and exploited. Lynching of Muslims in the name of cow protection is directly against the values of the constitution, but it takes place without repercussion. According to a report, in the last 18 months there have been 24 lynchings connected with the issue of cow slaughter or suspected smuggling of cattle. Asgar Qadri wrote, "The more pressing question is how do ordinary members of a nation, come to acquire the cognitive frames that motivate them to lynch? For the lynchings to become routine in the way they have in India, a considerable number of the nation's members must come to harbour a willingness to be potential killers. It is only then that a regime can tap into this willingness and provide the institutional environment in which free will, translates into practice. The scenes of crowds flogging Muslim men have marked a new low for India's democracy".

Taking cognizance of the situation, the Supreme Court of India suggested that a law be enacted to deal with lynching. It termed it as "horrendous acts of mobocracy", and asked Parliament to pass a law establishing lynching as a separate offence with punishment. It said the growing numbness of the ordinary Indian to the frequent incidents of lynching happening right before his eyes in a society based on rule of law is shocking. It gave a 11 point prescription to do away with societal, political and cultural malice. One of the prescriptions was "Central and the state governments should broadcast on radio and television and other media platforms including the official websites that lynching and mob violence shall invite serious consequence". But neither the central government nor the state governments have done anything to address this horrendous crime.

### **Undemocratic Government is a Greater Pandemic**

It is a sociological fact that in a crisis a country reveals its basic tenets. This is all the more true of India in this time of pandemic. COVID-19 affected all the countries and governments. But

it is extremely unfortunate that rulers of India not only did not plan timely and appropriately their response but also did not plan the lockdown properly. The lockdown in India is in its fifth phase. Whether it is the first or the second or third or the fourth phase, the government of India hardly showed any understanding of the effect of the virus that has affected the entire world; it hardly had any contingency plan to respond to this deadly virus; it hardly showed the political will to address the issues arising out of the virus and the lockdown; above all it had scant regard for the women headed households, people at high risk and especially migrant labourers. It showed hardly any openness to consult those who could contribute to protect, promote over 1,320 million population of the country; it did not have any sincerity to implement its own plans. Except claiming to be a 'global leader' in responding to the crisis created by the virus, it practically sacrificed the lives of the citizens.

As many have stated with pain and anger that the Government of India was and is engaged in knee-jerk responses; in obscure and obscurantist practices; extremely unplanned and half-baked moves; made tall promises but did not put in place systems and mechanisms to realise these promises; cynically poked at those countries where the number of positive cases of the virus was increasing; boasted of imposing lockdown without putting in place other necessary things; irrespective of being a federal government did not take into account the views and efforts of the state governments; now not knowing what to do and putting the responsibility on the state government; failing to take note of the good work of many state governments, civil society organisations, faith based organisations, even individuals; etc.

One of the segments of the Indian population which was totally and fundamentally deceived and devastated by both the omission and commission of the government of India is the migrant labourers. From 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, the horrible plight of the migrant labourers has hit both the national and international media. This section of the population who come from the lower caste and class are the backbone of Indian economy. But it is they who did not figure at all in the announcements and pronouncements, programs and plans, packages and reliefs of the government.

Irrespective of the fact that the migrant labourers were on the road walking hundreds and thousands of kilometers from the month of March itself, there was no plan to reach them home or provide relief or make travel arrangements. Irrespective of many dying on the way, being killed, run over by train, etc. not even scant attention was paid to address their issues. It is becoming clearer that it is not due to lack of political will that the ruling elite failed to take care of them in the lockdown and it appears that they wanted them to be wiped out from the face of the earth.

When the Prime Minister addressed the nation on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2020, there was nothing substantial in it which could be claimed as beneficial to the citizens of the country. From the day one when the lockdown was forcefully imposed, there are agonizing and anguishing stories of the plight of the millions of returnee migrant labourers. But the Prime Minister who boasts himself of being the 'saviour' of the poor and the working class, did not even utter a word about this. Forget about the migrant labourers, there was nothing for any Indian citizen. But by saying that his government is providing Rs. 20 lakh crores for schemes he played undemocratic politics.

The Prime Minister in his address to the nation paid lip service to economy. Further, he has been hiding facts and figures and proclaiming lies as facts. Economists are of the view that in the absence of credit impetus from the banks, early revival of credit to industry, services and even agriculture appears difficult. But further easing of rates may push inflation further up. Thus, on the one hand, there does not seem to be the possibilities of economy reviving for the betterment of the common man of the country. On the other hand, there is the possibility of inflation which will further add to the miseries of those who are in the margins of the country.

With the unplanned and unscrupulous imposition of lockdown, wheat, oil seeds and pulse seeds could not be harvested. This put the farmers into hardship in a big way. And also added to the woes and worries of the agricultural labourers who would have earned some wheat, pulse and oil seeds for their consumption. Some manage to earn enough grain for at least six months of the year. Now they are driven to starvation only. Moreover, due to the rains now crops like potatoes, mangoes, litchi etc. are badly affected. There is no compensation for these farmers but anti-farmers legislations are promulgated.

The Prime Minister has been harping on technology driven systems where everything will be at the use of the citizens. If this is true, why was this not pressed into use when millions of migrants had to walk for days, weeks and months to reach their home? Why should a mother tie her child to a trolley and pull that child for miles? Where was and is this technology which is supposed to drive the country? Is it only for a select few who plunder and destroy this country? Why was this technology not used to transport the migrant labourers who are the backbone of the economy of this country? Finding no answers to these questions, the common and conscious citizens feel totally deceived, defeated and decimated.

It is really amusing to hear the Prime Minister speaking of a vibrant democracy at this juncture. From the time he assumed the post of the Prime Minister, he and the coterie around have been doing one thing well, that is, destroying every democratic institution one by one. Whether it is the Supreme Court and the judiciary, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Reserve Bank of India (RBI), National Human Rights Commission, National Minority Commission, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Commission, Planning Commission, etc., all have been destroyed and decimated beyond repair.

The Constitution of India is the ultimate authority and deciding factor. But now there is an attempt to twist and turn the Constitution itself to suit the "One Nation, One Culture, One Religion, One People, One Leader". Instead of rule of law what is in practice in India is 'jungle raj', that is, rule by undemocratic, authoritarian, autocratic, leader and party. If an elected member of the ruling party can carry cricket bat and move around freely thrashing the government officials, then this has even crossed barbarism. What is depressing is that these kinds of blatant violation of law will motivate others to do similar acts. It is also projected as legitimate.

### **Collective Action for the Common Destiny of India**

Justice A. P. Shah delivering the memorial lecture of late Justice Hosbet Suresh titled "The Supreme Court in Decline: Forgotten Freedoms and Eroded Rights" on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

quoted from the book of Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, titled, 'How Democracies Die', stated, "most democratic breakdowns have been caused not by generals and soldiers but by elected governments". The book documents many instances of how elected leaders have subverted democratic institutions across the world. This subversion is carried out by the constitutional sanction of the ballot box, and even with approval from the legislature and the judiciary. This is absolutely the case of India today.

This emerging India provides opportunity for the Church and the Jesuits to understand the socio-economic, political, governance, cultural, religious and spiritual realms of India. The Jesuits as a progressive and potent force can utilize the emerging trends and play a major role in terms of foregrounding the constitutional values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Jesuits also have the duty to work in alliance with common masses, conscious citizens and concerned intellectuals and activists to work towards reinforcing and reestablishing a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, and republic India.

In this backdrop it is advantageous to foreground Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP) and see how we put these preferences into practice. Regarding the first preference, "To show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment", it can be stated that both in our life and mission, we have to see, touch, hear, speak, contemplate and trust in God always and in all situations. Further moving from an individualistic spirituality, we at personal, communal and apostolic examination of conscience, spiritual conversation, meaningful Eucharistic celebrations and spiritual practices, personal and apostolic discernments can re-evangelise ourselves the Jesuits to put this preference into practice. Further pastoral, renewal, educational, social, youth, communication and formation commissions need to come together to discern and evolve a program of action which is meaningful, spiritual and sustainable and a spirituality for collective action in a pluralistic country.

The second preference, "To walk with the poor... in a mission of reconciliation and justice" is foundational to the Jesuits. Over the years, this 'preferential option' became an integral missionary mandate of the Jesuits. GC 32, Decree 4: 42, in clear and categorical terms called for personal, institutional and structural change. "Our faith in Christ Jesus and our mission to proclaim the Gospel demand of us a commitment to promote justice and to enter into solidarity with the voiceless and the powerless. This commitment will move us seriously to be instructed in the complex problems which they face in their lives, then to identify and assume our own responsibilities to society". Jesuits are best placed to walk with the poor and the excluded, to stick their necks out to protect and promote their rights and to be engaged in reconciliation between various forces through justice, peace, democracy and secularism. It is not social work as wrongly interpreted but working towards reconciliation and salvation of all, especially the marginalised.

'To accompany young people', the third preference is an ecclesial and existential mandate. Church has always placed special importance on the youth. Pope Francis gave a Missionary Mandate to Youth through these three imperatives: (1) Go, (2) without fear, (3) to serve. This missionary mandate stems from the strength of Jesus' love. Hence, the missionary mandate to share this good news with and through the young people of all caste, class, gender, religion, region, language or orientations can make us truly Indian Christians. An

authoritarian and populist government tries to attract the youth with innumerable myths, lies and falsehood. We need to accompany the young people to know the truth and be freed by the truth and for truth.

“To collaborate in the care of our Common Home” is the fourth preference. The church's teaching about environmental responsibility and stewardship of natural resources is rooted in the message of Genesis, the goods of the earth are gifts from God. The relationship of humans with the world is a constitutive part of his human identity. This relationship is in turn the result of another still deeper relationship between human and God. The Lord has made human co-creator. But an undemocratic political regime which promotes individual profit and amassing of wealth by destroying God’s creation has to be resisted in alliance with democratic and secular forces.

Any effort to implement the UAPs against this background should take into account both the enabling factors and constraining conditions. Moreover, the Jesuits are called upon to enhance the enabling factors and reduce the constraints so as to implement these preferences. Further these have to be attempted within the existing administrative structures and if they are an impediment, alternative structures need to be evolved. Along with our collaborators and coworkers, alumni, people of good will, secular and civil society organisations, we have to respond personally, corporately, collaboratively, creatively and committedly.

*Original in English*



## Can We Retrieve Indian Democracy from the BJP's Hindu Nationalist Agenda?

**Virginia Saldanha**

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Seventy-three years after India was freed from British rule, our country finds itself enmeshed in a web of communalism and anti-people policies, with institutions of governance that safeguard democracy severely undermined.

For the first 25 years, people were complacent with the Indian National Congress (INC), till the declaration of Emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1974-77, and the suppression of dissent. But, democratic institutions like the judiciary still functioned independent of the Executive and Indira was tried and imprisoned for excesses during the Emergency. An alternate party hastily put together, ruled for a brief 3 years. However, over time, greed for wealth and power became a dominant pursuit.

The alternative to the INC slowly evolved into a right-wing Hindu Nationalist party called the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)<sup>1</sup>. Over successive years the country veered between the two parties and Indian democracy was hailed as one that is alive and mature.

The BJP aligned itself with the Hindu fundamentalist *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS)<sup>2</sup> that actively works at the grassroots with missionary zeal. Hindu nationalism began to establish itself drawing more and more people into its fold. More adherents were claimed to Hinduism than is historically true. They are skilled in spinning new narratives to suit their view of modern India. Narratives were created to show Muslims and Christians as potential threats to the Hindu majority. Several incidents of violence targeted the minority communities.

The 2014 general election swept BJP to power winning 282/545 seats. In 2019 they returned with a thumping majority, winning 303/543 seats in parliament, backed by a skilled technological team managing their propaganda machine. They claimed they would restore

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<sup>1</sup> Bharathaya Janata Party – means Indian People's Party. It is the Current ruling party in India. It had its roots in the Bharatya Jana Sangh – which is the political wing of the Hindu fundamentalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The Jana Sangh joined with others to form the Janata Party in 1977 after the Emergency of Indira Gandhi in India.

<sup>2</sup> RSS – Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, literally translated means National Volunteer Organization was formed in September 1925 in response to oppression of Hindus by British rule In India; is an Indian right-wing, Hindu nationalist, all-male, paramilitary volunteer organisation.

India to its former Hindu glory. Revival of Hindu rituals, festivals and religious sentiments was used to construct a Hindu nationalist base for the BJP. Politics based on religious nationalism divided the country heralding the death of secularism. Reinforced by hate narratives about minority communities, violence erupted in neighbourhoods that had earlier lived together in harmony and peace.

In the economic sphere, India moved from a mixed economy to a capitalist and global market economy where labour rights were watered down. Private investment was encouraged for creation and accumulation of wealth by a few to the impoverishment of large numbers of citizens in the labour force. Capitalists from different parts of the world found it profitable to invest in India. In turn, many Indian capitalists (resident and non-resident) patronized political parties.

In a shocking move emboldened by its second consecutive win, the government unilaterally revoked Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which guaranteed special autonomy to Muslim dominated Jammu & Kashmir and bifurcated the state into two separate union territories, bringing the region under the direct control of the central government in August 2019. A complete communication clampdown, restrictions on movement and mass detentions in the region enabled the change. In violation of India's international obligations, the entire population of Kashmir was deprived of their right to freedom of expression, media censorship, detention of political leaders, with little to no redressal. The lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic has further marginalised the people of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and severely affected their access to justice.

The growing opposition to changes in the citizenship laws saw the government using a variety of restrictive laws, including national security and counterterrorism legislation, to arrest and imprison human rights defenders, peaceful protesters and critics. Many arrests were made on fabricated charges. The global civil society alliance CIVICUS<sup>3</sup> states in a report of Sept. 22, 2020 that a year into the second term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there is an increasingly repressive environment for freedom of expression, association and assembly. Unbridled power vested in the police is used against ordinary citizens, to silence dissenters; Adivasis and forest dwellers for land grab; or stage "police encounters" that target minority groups.

On the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the constitution, India was ranked 10 places lower in the Economist Intelligence Unit's world democracy index.

Since 2014 the NDA government has been rolling back the rights of citizens through cleverly crafted "amendments" to existing Laws to curb any perceived threat to the government, or to pave the way for corporations to flourish. Taking advantage of their majority in parliament the government has been passing bills in parliament with hardly any debate. By increasing

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<sup>3</sup> CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world. <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/who-we-are/about-civicus> accessed 25.09.2020

the use of ordinances to pass laws, the government flouts democratic norms and undermines the spirit of parliamentary democracy.

The Covid 19 pandemic has provided a good excuse to curtail parliamentary rules so as to limit the intervention of the Opposition for passing of legislations. Several controversial Bills are being passed during the current session of parliament.

Distractions like arrest and questioning of film stars by politicising a star's suicide probe, helps divert attention from the real problems of the economy already in a downward spiral before the pandemic. The total mismanagement of the lockdown caused untold hardship and death to numerous poor migrant workers.

While India has a vibrant group of activists both men and women, they are a minority. The large educated majority are unconcerned. They do not even go out to vote. Our voting average remains between 50 – 60% at best.

### **Why did this happen?**

#### *1) Complacency of the middle class*

Catholics are taught to follow rules and regulations but not to live their faith in the world. Politics is considered "dirty" so they do not engage with it. While we are great at charity, political action is beyond our consciousness. Complacency applies to the whole Indian middle class. There is a severe lack of a mass-based people's movement.

#### *2) Patriarchy*

Patriarchy and democracy are not compatible while feminism and democracy go together. Democracy is built on a human rights framework. *"Feminism has fought no wars, killed no opponents, set up no concentration camps, starved no enemies, practiced no cruelties. Its battles have been for education, for the vote, for better working conditions, for safety in the streets, for child care, for social welfare, for rape crisis centres, women's refuges, reforms in the law."*<sup>4</sup> While every woman is not a feminist, there are several men who are professed feminists. One has to cultivate feminist perspectives and qualities. Jesus was the first feminist. He stood against the oppressive patriarchal norms and traditions of his time. We need to cultivate the feminist values he taught like love, justice, servant-leadership and self-sacrifice.

Democracy is government working for people. It promotes equality, respects all irrespective of financial or social status. Democracy is built on the idea that leaders are elected to serve the people, akin to the servant leadership taught by Jesus with focus on the poor and the weakest sections of people.

Patriarchy privileges the man and establishes hierarchical structures where the upper caste wealthy man is at the top. Male perspectives hold sway and dominate all decision making. It condones exploitation of the poor, the vulnerable, the weak including women for political and

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<sup>4</sup> Spender, Dale. (December 1990). "Man Made Language", Routledge & Kegan Paul Books.

economic gain. Patriarchy promotes unsustainable and exploitative capitalism, glorifies and even endorses violence. Both women and men are part of the promotion and maintenance of patriarchy. The culture and tradition that developed within this system puts power in the hands of the wealthy and shrewd to the impoverishment of the poor and marginalized.

Stereotyping has created moulds for people of the different castes/religions/genders. Gender minorities are seen as human aberrations and often persecuted. Minority religions are viewed with suspicion and judged on superficial manifestations which are generalised. Stereotyping breeds elitism, casteism, homophobia, othering of people and constructs social hierarchies contrary to the values of democracy. Often violence is used to keep women, gender minorities and subaltern groups in their social place. The poor woman and girl child are at the very bottom of the patriarchal pyramid and the most oppressed. They are trafficked, exploited as cheap labour and sexually abused as well.

Economic systems are built on patriarchal values and models, so the Gross Domestic Product measures the economic progress of a country, leaving out the unpaid labour of women done in caring and nurturing work in homes, agriculture and the vast array of volunteer work. Very little value is given to farmers who produce our food, which is the basic necessity for life. White-collar workers, and information technology professionals are paid inordinately higher wages, as that sector has high demand and draws in the most money. While India boasts of creating some of the wealthiest men in the world, it has the distinction of having the largest percentage of its population living below the poverty line.

### **The Way forward:**

We need to broaden and strengthen the present women's movement that is very alert and active in India, to form a broad-base people's movement. Network with them. Having worked for the Commissions for Women at the diocesan, national and Asian level, I feel that the empowerment of women is not a priority in the Church. Not just women but even men have to be empowered with a feminist or rights-based perspective.

Following elections, we should be pursuing political parties ensuring that they keep their election promises like providing good education, universal healthcare and affordable housing to every citizen. We need to organize people to visit their offices, write letters and call them up to show we are alert and watching their performance. Organize meetings with the elected leaders before and after parliamentary sessions.

The globalization of economies aimed at wealth creation has caused extensive environmental degradation. A lot of awareness is needed to make people aware of their own consumption patterns and lifestyles to save the environment. Market values breed a "civilisation of greed", whereas an infusion of Gospel values through lived example will create a "civilisation of Love".

To ensure social justice and protection of the environment, dismantle patriarchy. Human rights and human values need to be mainstreamed through all stages of education. All text books should reflect these values. Critical thinking has to be inculcated in education. Farming, nurturing and care work need to be given high value. Discourage machoism and promote

feminism. Encourage all to develop their talents and gifts so that they can grow to their full potential as God created them to be. Rules and regulations should reflect equality and social justice.

Using the human rights framework, we need to critique cultures of exclusion. Teach that the personal is political. The way we use our status of class, caste and gender, in relation to others impacts society. The low castes have to change their mindset of begging for their rights, the higher class/castes have to understand that they no longer are the patrons of the poor. In a democracy doing justice is a responsibility and duty. Teach care work to men, make them gentle, caring and loving so that men become partners with women in the home and carry these values to their work spheres as well. Replace organizational hierarchies with circular leadership.

“If Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country. Hinduism is a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity. On that account, it is incompatible with democracy. Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost”<sup>5</sup> said Dr. BR Ambedkar.

Ambedkar viewed a religion by the way it was practiced in his times and how it affected society as a whole. He strongly disagreed with some practices of Hinduism especially the caste system. He was critical of Islam for the social evils prevalent amongst Muslims. His words and writings have advocated the creation of a modern India where religion is like a guiding light and not a set of rules people need to adhere to at all costs.<sup>6</sup> He critiqued Christianity because of the attitudes of India’s colonial Christian masters towards people of other faiths but admired the teachings of Jesus.

Therefore, we need to highlight and promote the positive values in beliefs and cultures of all faiths. Critique the misuse of religion for political gain. Stress human values and make human rights sacred.

Christians have the blueprint of mission handed to us by Jesus in Luke 4:15-19 and the Gospels. Sadly, the Church leadership has not fully lived up to this mission. It focuses on its institutions, its power and sway in the world. It silences its critics, covers up its wrong doing and is accountable to no one. We first have to set our own house in order before we can point a finger to any corrupt government.

The Church leadership should change itself and its systems radically to become leaven in Indian society. Christian activists find more fulfilling engagement with secular activists who believe in basic human values, than with the Church. In Christian Europe while Churches are empty, the streets are full of protestors against environmental degradation, supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, migrants and refugees. They believe in Jesus as they know him in the Gospels, not in the Jesus taught by the clerics.

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<sup>5</sup> Ambedkar, BR. (scrollroll.com) <http://www.scrollroll.com/b-r-ambedkar-quotes/> accessed 09.09.2020.

<sup>6</sup> Vishnu NS in 35 BR Ambedkar Quotes on the Constitution, Hinduism, Islam and India, <http://www.scrollroll.com/b-r-ambedkar-quotes/> accessed 09.09.2020.

On the global level we need to lobby the UN to widen its engagement with civil society. A channel has to be created through which people of a country can appeal to the UN to intervene when governments indulge in large scale human rights violations. On the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its birth a discussion was held on strengthening the voices and participation of civil society, the private sector, academia and other non-state actors in the work of the United Nations. People working at the grassroots level have to be given more leverage in the UN Economic & Social Council. The Catholic Church should ensure its representative in this body as well as in the Committee for the Status of Women is a feminist woman.

Pope Francis' prophetic voice has a significant impact on the world, but sadly has outdated views on women. Jesuits run large influential educational institutions, which can be seedbeds of change. While engaging the current generation to raise their voice against the unethical and undemocratic moves of governments, education for change is basic for the dawn of a new world of equality, justice and peace. Partnering with women and men with feminist perspectives is an imperative.

Jesuits should engage more in pastoral work! Help and encourage people to change their practises of faith by emphasising a spirituality geared towards a sustainable wholistic lifestyle. Arundhati Roy said, "Another world is not only possible – she is on her way." Draw in people with a feminist life giving perspective to make a "another world" possible. If Christian living moves from ritualism to a spirituality based on gospel values of caring, solidarity, promotion of justice and peace another world is possible.

*Original in English*



## Challenges to Democracy in India

**Irfan Engineer**

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- *Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary – Reinhold Niebuhr*
- *Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education – Franklin D. Roosevelt*
- *Democracy is not the law of the majority by the protection of the minority. – Albert Camus*
- *Democracy feeds on argument, on the discussion as to the right way forward. This is the reason why respecting opinions of others belongs to democracy. - Richard von Weizsaecker*

The idea of democracy invokes two imaginations in us – having a wider ownership or involvement in governance and equality. Democracy at the minimum is a system of governance but is much more than just that. Abraham Lincoln famously described this system as government of the people, for the people and by the people. We have known three types of states – **monarchy** ruled by single ruler – the emperor claiming his rule as mission of divinity, with dynastic principle of succession and support of Church (not just Christians, but all religious institutions); **oligarchy** where the authority that wields power is chosen from among a minority elite class; and **democracy** where broader community of people chose their rulers and vest them with authority.

Democracy reverses the equation between the ruler and the ruled. In monarchy and oligarchy, church and the divine are considered sovereign and source of power. Subjects are just benevolent beneficiaries whose consent is not necessary to govern. As Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) believed, human beings at their core are selfish creatures and their natural state of existence would be in state of constant war. Absolute monarch restores order and peace with fear of punishments. In democracy on the other hand, sovereignty vests with the people. All human beings inherently have certain rights and they get together in a social contract to vest power with certain authorities in the state that must be accountable to the people.

Democracy is combination of two Greek words – *demos*, meaning people and *kratos*, meaning power or authority. Therefore, notionally and ideally, democracy means that the power rests in the people. People elect the government, for a fixed period, invest it with appropriate authority and in turn, the government is accountable to the people. People's representatives

deliberate on taxation, budget, various policy issues, and exercise supervision over the law enforcement agencies and establishment of public order. However, this is only the ideal situation.

Whether the elected representatives are able to perform effective supervision over the executive, and legislate good laws that are for the greater common good of the citizens depends on many factors. One of the factors is – is there a written constitution or a social contract that gives the elected representatives effective powers in order to make the executive answerable to the people? Can the people's representatives exercise effective control over the taxation and budget? Is there an institutional structure like the Public Accounts Committee for oversight of Government expenditure and consisting of members of all the parties elected in the legislature? Is there an independent auditor supported by constitutional provisions with access to all the necessary files and documents of the executive to look into the expenditure by the executive? Are there any independent and effective mechanisms for the citizens to complain about their legitimate grievances vis-à-vis the state and its bureaucracy for non-compliance of provisions of law or for denying them their rights or legal claims, or receiving services from the government or for being discriminated? Is there independent judiciary to adjudicate disputes between citizens and between citizens and the state? Is there independent media to inform and report to people various policies, measures and functioning of the government; where informed debates in the public sphere can be carried on? Are there legislations and mechanisms that empower the citizens with right to information, which makes the government function transparently? If the elected representatives are not functioning to deliver and fulfil their promises for which they were elected, or have indulged in corruption, do the people have the right to recall their representatives or change a non-performing regime mid-term?

The more the absolute, unaccountable and centralised authority vested in the executive, it is more likely that the democracy in that country is merely formal and representational and not substantial. We have namesake representational democracy when the citizens lose control more or less entirely after electing their representatives and cannot hold their representatives accountable until the next elections. In this model of democracy, the only very limited role citizens have in the governance is that of casting a vote to elect their representatives. Whereas in substantial democracy, the citizens can access various mechanisms, and institutional structures to participate in the day-to-day functioning of the governance, express their opinions on various policy measures and legislations being conceived and enacted. We can call this model of democracy as participatory democracy or substantial democracy, which encourages active citizenship beyond casting of votes.

The governance structure can be unitary or multi-tiered and federal. The latter has power sharing between various tiers of government. The country is divided into various federating units – states or provinces, which may be further sub-divided into counties/districts, which in turn may be further sub-divided into administrative blocks. The more the tiers of governance, the nearer the access of the citizens to the lower tiers of governance and the more the opportunities for the citizens to participate in the governance as active citizens. The lower tiers of governance, however, must have effective and well-defined powers, jurisdiction and

financial resources to exercise authority and govern meaningfully. The more the decentralization and devolution of powers to the lower tiers, the more participatory would be the functioning of democracy involving wider sections of the citizens.

The Constituent Assembly of India deliberated for three years from 1946 to 1949 to frame the Constitution and had 299 members elected from the provincial legislative assemblies. There were 13 committees to help with the drafting of the Constitution, including the Drafting Committee chaired by Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. The Preamble of the Constitution brings out the essence of the Constitution and begins with the words, "We the people of India". The sovereignty therefore rests with the people of India and they are the framers of the Constitution. The Preamble further defines the Indian Republic to be sovereign, secular, democratic and socialist and guarantees its citizens Justice (social, economic and political) liberty (of expression, thoughts and religion), equality (of status and opportunities) and fraternity.

The Constitution of India outlines the directive principles of the state policy – giving direction to the state as to what it should achieve. These include right to adequate means of livelihood for all citizens; equitable distribution of material resources of the community for the common good; prevention of concentration of wealth and means of production; equal pay for equal work for men and women; secure living wages, a decent standard of living and social and cultural opportunities for all workers; and take steps to secure the participation of workers in the management of industries. These are some actions listed here, but there are more such which go beyond liberal principles emphasizing freedoms, equality between citizens and upholding of human dignity.

The Constitution also envisages active citizenship. The citizens have 11 fundamental duties, which includes – to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women; to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures; to develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform, among others.

### **Threats to democracy**

Democracy certainly is a more representative system as compared to monarchy and oligarchy where a single person in case of monarchy and a small privileged group in case of oligarchy monopolize power in their hands and often work for their own interests. However, democracy too may not be much better improvement over the two systems in many cases. Although the ruling elite is elected in a formal representative democracy, once elected, they may behave like oligarchs, particularly if they create a more centralized authority and concentrate power in an individual or a small group. The possibility of concentration of power may happen due to variety of reasons – a Unitarian governance structure is more conducive to such a possibility, where the institutional structure that ensures checks and balances is weak and caves in to pressures by an individual or a well-organized and tightly knit group. Secondly, and more importantly, citizens are manipulated to lower their guards and intellect, tapping

and building on their irrational fear of a class of citizens with different identity and pose them as existential threat that would destroy their 'great and superior' culture or way of life. The targeted community may even be represented as a threat to their security and the situation as a constant and a long-drawn war where they need to be exterminated before they exterminate 'us'. In a war, then, one does not deliberate with the 'enemy' within the democratic institutional structure provided. The intensity and the degree of animosity may differ as it is culture specific and it also depends on the history and symbols that appeal.

Citizens are asked to place their trust in the leader to lead them to victory using all means. Such a mobilization (which goes beyond mere electoral mobilization) persuades individuals to be completely submissive and converts the charismatic leader as saviour and a 'general' who needs to have all necessary powers to be victorious in this war keeping aside niceties of institutional and checks and balances that enable wider involvement of the citizens in governance. This is happening in India.

The charismatic leader invokes and panders to the pride carefully nurtured by him and his political machinery. The higher the pride, the lower the guard and more submissive the citizens become --becoming like subjects of the monarch; willing to surrender all the rights and needing nothing from the leader turned monarch. Hate crimes are committed and hatred against the targeted community continuously whipped up. The 'we' community is represented as a victim and victimhood nurtured. The victimhood of the 'we' community is satiated with every atrocity on the hapless targeted 'enemy' community. In India the targeted communities are the 'foreign races' whose holy land are outside the boundaries of the country viz. Muslims and Christians. In US the targeted community is the 'unruly' African-Americans and in some European countries, where right wing forces are strong, immigrants, particularly the Asians and the Muslims. The charismatic populist leader promises great future. President Trump promises to make America great again and PM of India, Narendra Modi promises to make India vishwaguru or great leader of the world.

The charismatic populist leader sharply polarizes the populace along religio-cultural fault lines and employs every symbol in his/her archery to polarize more and more, so all citizens have not yet wholly submitted and some won't are brought into the net. Those citizens who do not submit to the will of the charismatic leader are deemed traitors to the cause to be eliminated too. The entire might of the state authority is then used to suppress the dissenting individuals. The poor and the marginalised, the unemployed and excluded get divided along the religio-cultural fault lines and instead of resolving the livelihood issues of the hungry, farmers, unemployed workers, it is sufficient to be targeting the 'enemy' community as a solution to the economic issues.

The charismatic leader pooh-poohs all the institutions of democracy and weakens them using popular support as his plea. The autonomy of the educational institutions is targeted as breeding centres of dissent-traitors. Goons were sent on the prestigious Jawaharlal University Campus to attack the students who do not support the government. No one has been arrested in the case. Police entered the library of Jamia Milia Islamia Campus without the permission of the Vice-Chancellor and beat up the students in the library and arbitrarily arrested many

of them, making examples of them and nearly finishing their careers. The leading dissenters are being slapped with charges under the draconian UAPA law which is meant for terrorists.

The judiciary is weakened using popularity. Recently, in a webinar organized by CSSS and other organizations, the retired Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court lamented the role of Supreme Court of India; just watching the violations of the rights of citizens and reluctant to intervene, becoming more of an executive court leaning towards the executive rather than rights court upholding the fundamental rights of the citizens.

The legislature is manipulated to serve the whims of the leader. In India soon after the present government got elected in the year 2014 a series of ordinances were passed and the ordinances would be reissued if they were not approved by the legislature because of lack of majority in the upper house. The special powers of the executive to issue an ordinance when the Parliament is not in session is to be used exceptionally only in emergency. However, the Narendra Modi Government normalised it as an executive rule by decree. Recently, three farm ordinances were rushed through the upper house by voice vote even though some members were demanding division, knowing that many of the alliance parties had opposed the legislations. The opposition was sure that the bill would have failed to muster the majority in the upper house. When the division was denied some members of the opposition parties rushed into the well of the house to show the rule to the presiding officer; which stated that even if one member demanded division, the chair would have to grant the demand. Here the entire opposition was demanding division. Eight opposition MPs were suspended for 'unruly' behaviour in the house.

However, even before populism emerged on the scenario, even with the liberal democracy and democratic institutions working as normal, the inequalities in the world was growing. The ideology of markets led to hunger and greater marginalization of the poor and indebtedness of the third world. The powerful lobbies representing the interests of the capitalist class could influence the decision-making process within the government and through control of media influence the discourse and opinion making. Manufacturing consent as Noam Chomsky states.

The church, educational institution and the civil society should have a primary role in strengthening democracy at grass roots. Democracy gets strengthened with active citizenship and citizens watching the performance of the government and challenging wherever necessary within constitutional means. Educated and aware citizens is sine qua non of healthy democracy. Citizens can then get organized and democratize the public discourse where variety of opinions are heard and the best that serve the noble goals of humanity are followed and acted upon. Mahatma Gandhi was against the rule by majority, if it became oppressive to minorities. His solution was not rule of majority but Antyodaya - welfare and upliftment of the last person.

*Original in English*



## Cleaning up after Original Sin

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Australia is fortunate in being free from the sharp polarisation, rabid politicisation of social and other issues, and focus on a wilful leader who unashamedly seeks his own interests, which we associate with nations where authoritarianism and popularism rule. But those threats to democracy are present in embryonic form and need to be addressed. That will be difficult. In this essay I shall explore a dynamic that has encouraged authoritarianism and populism in Australia, comment on the influence of the acceptance of neo-liberal economic orthodoxy on this process, and reflect on the ways in which citizens and Churches can be agents of healing within democracy.

### **An original sin: the treatment of people who seek protection**

Many streams flow into the rivers which threaten to wash democracy away. In Australia one of the most significant is the treatment of refugees. Over thirty years ago when Indochinese refugees began to arrive in Australia by boat the Australian Government responded by detaining them indefinitely. The motive for detention, sometimes fudged to make it appear to be lawful, was to deter other people from arriving by boat. This instrumental use of people as pawns in someone else's game was like an original sin in Australian public life. It denied the innate dignity of each human being, which forbade them from being used as ends to other means. Once this unethical behaviour was accepted it could be used to justify any abuse.

Over many years as more people sought protection from persecution in Australia, the instrumental logic of deterrence spread its tentacles into more and more areas of government. In order to become more effective instruments of deterrence, people who arrived by boat had to be met with increasingly harsh treatment. People seeking asylum in Australia were stripped of more of their basic supports, stayed longer in detention, were stripped of effective access to the protection of law, and despatched to off-shore detention centres nominally under the control of other nations where officers effectively had impunity. These measures represented a growing ethical corruption that flowed from the failure to recognise innate human dignity. They also opened the way for other groups of people in Australia to be stripped of their legal and cultural protections and to be treated in similar instrumental ways.

Appeals by advocates for refugees to be treated with compassion and fairness were met by Government with populist appeals to racist and moral stereotypes. At a time when terrorism in the name of a bastard form of Islam was prominent in public conversation, people who fled from persecution were described as 'of Middle Eastern appearance'. They were also falsely accused of throwing their babies overboard so that they would be rescued. That the accusation was believed credible reflected the lack of respect for humanity of those who made it. Refugees were also maligned for their apparent wealth (some wore wristwatches) and not by their humanity.

The effects of making the abusive treatment of one group of people the key to deterring others from taking similar action are twofold. In the first place it inevitably entails the increasingly brutal treatment of its victims. Any faint possibility that a few people might seek protection is seen as a threat to security which can be met only by a more punitive regime. The account in his prize winning book *No Friend but the Mountains* by Behrouz Bouchani, a Kurdish detainee on Manus Island, spells out in appalling detail what this meant for detainees. They were dependent on the prison officers for everything, their requests for information were blocked or referred further up a closed line, they were known as numbers, protests were met with violence, they were dehumanised and lost their distinctive humanity. Some, like Bouchani, survived with their humanity intact, but at great cost.

The brutality of such a policy and of its administration has also further entrenched the ideology that spawned it. The only justification that could be found for the destruction of human lives, for the devices employed to avoid scrutiny of what was being done, and for the cost incurred in further dehumanising the people detained, lay in the conviction that deterrence was vitally necessary and effective despite all the evidence to the contrary.

This mindset is authoritarian in nature and naturally tends to remove obstacles to its will. In Australia it has led particularly to weakening the protection of law enjoyed by an increasing number of people. People who had not taken out citizenship, even if resident in Australia since childhood, were liable for even relatively minor offences, to be sent back to a country of origin whose language they did not speak. After serving time in prison, they were also held in detention until their appeal process was exhausted. Australians fighting for causes overseas are now liable to have their citizenship removed altogether. In the course of these changes, the immigration department became a Border Force, with all its military trappings.

This story tells how unethical disregard for the humanity of people, such as that involved in treating them badly for ends extraneous to themselves, leads naturally to the reinforcement of an ideology that justifies this treatment. It also corrupts other policies and sets of relationships, encourages the demonising of any groups that it targets, and breeds an authoritarian exercise of power that spreads further through national life. Where the institutions of law, of media independent of government, of courts, and of army and police subject to law are solidly founded, as they are in Australia, these effects are limited but still erode the strength of democracy. Where civil institutions are weak and manipulable, however, they can overturn democratic processes and put at risk vulnerable people's lives.

## **A Social Sin: Neo-liberal Ideology**

Another force also weakens democracy and encourages authoritarian rule. It is the acceptance of neo-liberal ideology that reduces society to economically competitive individuals. It has governed Australian economic policies, its treatment of people who are disadvantaged, and its patterns of employment. Its corrosive effects have been revealed in the coming of Coronavirus. The inadequate support by both Federal and State Governments of the health system is evident in the spread of the virus into nursing homes. Private providers have placed profits before the welfare of patients, reducing quality of care and relying on undertrained casual workers who must work in several nursing homes to earn a living. As a result the virus has spread across the system to residents, workers and medical staff.

The reduction of public spending on housing and the *laissez faire* regulation of employment which encourages casual employment where employers have few duties to their employees have also made for high unemployment, disguised temporarily by Government support. When this support is reduced, homelessness and poverty and unemployment will grow. The human cost of this on families through poverty, stress leading to mental illness and domestic violence and the loss of a generation of young people who lose connection with society will be massive.

Even before the virus struck, the neo-liberal premises which governed Australian economic policy were threadbare. The economy was stagnant, largely because of increasing inequality. This is the natural outcome of the belief that loosely regulated economic competition between individuals would create a prosperous and healthy society, with the corollary that governments should have the smallest possible role in society. It predictably led to a society in which the wealth of the wealthy increased while others became indebted and their work precarious, corporations became politically even more powerful, debt multiplied, and people could not afford to buy the goods or services that were produced.

The need to respond to the virus made it clear that a society based on competition between individuals was unviable. The threat could be met only if people set aside their individual economic interests to ensure that all in the community were free from the virus. The good of each person depended on each serving the good of all. Governments imposed restrictions that limited economic activity in order to protect people and laid the foundations for a resurgent economy by massive Government expenditure. It was a time for solidarity in which political processes transcended the polarisation and mutual blame in which they had previously been bogged.

This solidarity, however, is disappearing in the economic response to the coronavirus which will exacerbate economic inequality, favour the interest of large corporations which will profit at the expense of the unemployed and precariously employed. This further diminishes the faith of people in the political process which serves the interests of the powerful and has no respect for the common good. Parliament and the institutions through which democracy is exercised are further marginalised, are increasingly subject to manipulation through large scale financing of political parties and social media campaigns during elections, and through partisan media. Political conversation becomes more polarised and rancorous.

In an environment where political parties are united in the determination to maintain inequality and to privilege keeping or attaining power over the common good, democracy withers slowly. Legislation introduced to deal with crises involves an infringement on human rights that may be justified in an emergency, but is not withdrawn afterwards. The ethical corruption embodied in the policy towards people seeking protection and extended into other policy areas, erodes further the protection of law. Increasing numbers of people are effectively deprived by poverty and dependence on insecure employment of freedom to lead purposeful lives. In such a world, respect for democracy withers.

### **Cleaning up after original sin**

This story describes only one of the many strands of the threat to democracy in Australia. It traces the path of ethical corruption from the treatment of people seeking protection to a refugee policy built around the abuse of people in order to deter others, to its spread to other policies. The process weakens democratic governance, which is built on the respect owed to each human being and their right to be consulted. This kind of ethical corruption is like a skin cancer that spreads beneath the skin to affect other organs. It will not be eradicated by a single surgical operation but will demand complex therapy.

The healing must go deeper than protesting against the trivialisation and polarisation of debate and against the media that give space to the campaigns of opportunistic leaders. It must touch the ethical basis on which democracy rests. This is a large and difficult task. Where a society accepts that people may be treated harshly and unjustly for the supposed benefit of others, any small victory won for one group will be easily overturned and will be followed by other worse actions. The health of democracy depends on widespread and instinctive adherence of people to its ethical bases. Particularly to the principle that no one may be used as a means to someone else's end. When this principle is not strongly endorsed in a society and is routinely violated in government actions, healing must begin in conversion.

Conversion usually begins when a few people rediscover a long lost truth. It runs against the grain, requiring wild-eyed prophets or Diogenes with his lamp to insist in polite and rough-edged company alike that this or that action is not right, that no society should tolerate it, that we can be better than this.

After the prophets come organised groups who heed their message. Many non-government organisations were founded on the principle that each human being has a non-negotiable and inalienable dignity. They must ensure that their own workers and the people whom they accompany understand this principle and are completely committed to its implications for public policy and their own administration. It will then be in the DNA of such institutions to protest strongly against government action and policy that violate the principle. If such not-for-profit institutions are united in denouncing brutal and unprincipled treatment of people, they may well not prevail over a determined government, but they will give it cause to reflect. They will also encourage reflection in the broader society about the values that should guide it.

The most effective way of commending ethical values to society is by embodying them in actions, not by speaking about them. In the relationships between management and workers, between workers and the people whom they serve, and between management, government and donors, it is vital that schools, hospitals and other institutions embody a respect for persons that trumps their financial and other interests. The people whom they serve and on whose resources they draw on must find in these organisations an integrity that is both challenging and attractive.

### **Church, Jesuits and Healing**

These considerations apply especially to the Church if it is to be an agent of healing. Its preaching and public interventions of the Church must embody respect for persons as persons. The possibility of its words being heard, believed and being able to heal the ethical wounds suffered by democracies, however, will depend on the internal relationships within the Churches and between the Church and the society of which it is part. People must see in the Church a consistent and scrupulous respect for the humanity of all its members, particularly the most vulnerable

In Australia, at least, people currently find that difficult. Many see the Church through the eyes of children who were sexually abused by officers of the Church, and whose abuse was covered up by other officers, to be revealed only by journalists who received little thanks for their persistence. The sexual abuse of children by officers of the Church for their own gratification is as appalling an example of treating people instrumentally as can be imagined. Until people who were abused are persuaded that what they experienced does not characterise the Church, will never be forgotten, and cannot happen again, the Church will not be a credible witness to ethical integrity.

In Australia, too, a condition of credibility is that the internal relationships between Catholics be seen as respectful. In a society that looks for equality between men and women as evidence of ethical integrity, the lack of representation of lay people women in Catholic positions of leadership and the clericalism so decried by Pope Francis also hinder people from looking to the Church for ethical leadership and encouragement.

The Catholic Church as an institution struggles for credibility. Our proper public dress for now is sackcloth. Even so, however, the heart of the Church lies in the grass roots relationships between committed Catholics. In their interactions in the Church community and society they can display and argue for ethical integrity.

Church sponsored and faith-based institutions through which most Australians are likely to meet the Catholic Church, too, can commend and defend a proper ethical basis to public policy. Catholic organisations are responsible for the education of a large number of children, for the health care of many Australians, and the support of many others in need. If in their internal relationships they display and require a scrupulous respect for one another and a respect for the personal dignity of each person whom they support in their work, as well as a passionate concern for the most vulnerable, they will then have the standing to demand

similar respect from governments in their policies. This provides the basis for a healing of a broken democracy.

We Jesuits are sinful members of a sinful Church. We have no privileged path to being healers as well as patients. We do, however, have a tradition of discernment both of the currents flowing through society and of the proper compass bearings to follow. By attending to the fears, angers, desires and interests that underlie the slogans and demands and animate the policies of our day we can have some influence on our Catholic community. And through our ministries we can touch the broader society.

This may seem very minimal. Democratic institutions, however, were built slowly by many people. They crumble by the vandalism and neglect of many people. They will need the attention and participation of many people, including Catholics and us Jesuits among them, to repair and strengthen them. This is work for humble people who make humble contributions.

*Original in English*



## Healing Democracy in an Era of Authoritarianism and Populism – A View from Australia

**Frank Brennan, SJ**

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The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index for 2019 assessed 167 countries, of which only 22 were classed as 'full democracies'. Australia is one of them. Australia is ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in the world with an overall score of 9.09 out of a possible 10. Australia is given full marks for its electoral process and pluralism and for civil liberties. It also scores well for functioning of government (8.93) and political culture (8.75). But it scores only 7.78 for political participation.<sup>1</sup> The Australian index has varied slightly from year to year since 2006, dropping to 9.01 (in the years 2014, 2015 and 2016) having peaked at 9.22 (in the years 2010, 2011, and 2012). The average Australian index over those years has been 9.11.<sup>2</sup>

Australia is therefore a good case study of a nation state where the settings and architecture for democracy are fairly steady and amongst the best in the world. So where problems are identified, we can assume that it is not simply a matter of improving the settings and the architecture as would be the case with those countries which are classed as 'flawed democracies', 'hybrid regimes', or 'authoritarian regimes'. Even with the right settings and architecture, the future of democracy is not assured in any modern nation state.

According to the Economist Index, political participation in Australia is at the same level as countries like the USA, Spain, France and Italy which fall below Australia in the overall democracy rating. And Australia's political participation is markedly less than Germany, the UK, Austria and Israel even though these countries fall below Australia in the overall democracy rankings.

Australia is a nation state with robust democratic institutions including a fully elected bicameral parliament and an independent judiciary with a strong commitment to the rule of law. There are surely problems with Australian democracy. Since 1996, there has been a regular survey of Democratic Satisfaction in Australia. The latest survey was conducted in 2018. The surveyors found: 'In general, levels of trust in government and politicians in

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<sup>1</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit. *Democracy Index 2019*. p. 10

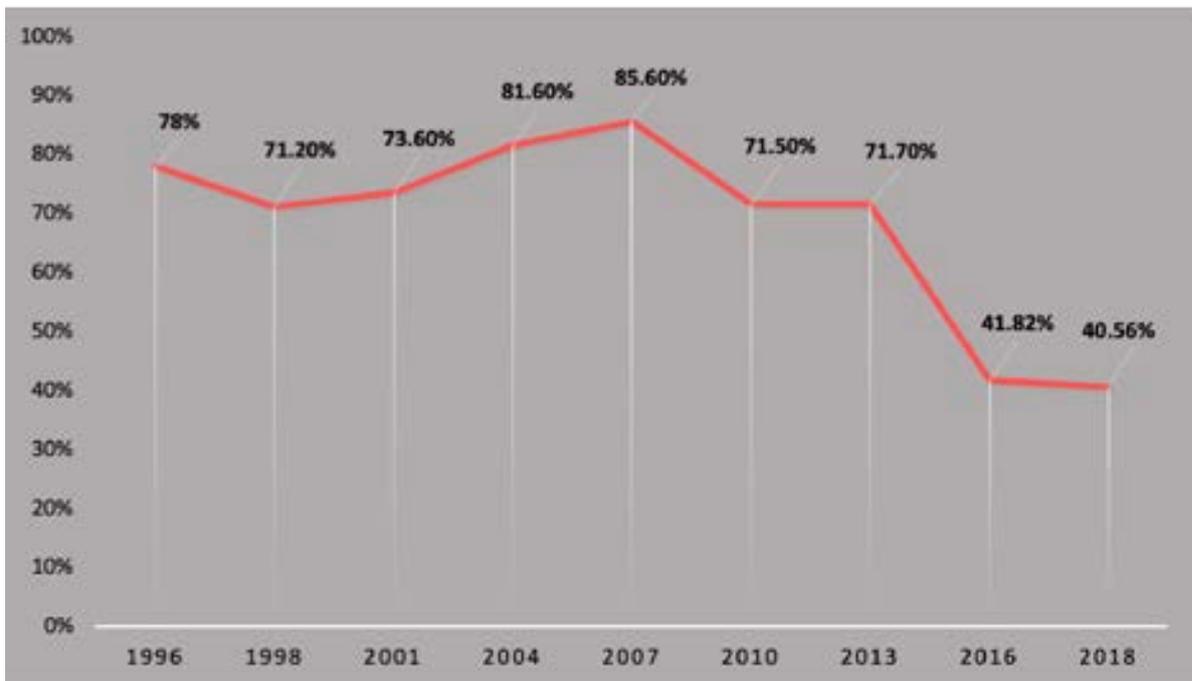
<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20

Australia are at their lowest levels since times series data has been available.<sup>3</sup> This decline of trust has carried across to other public institutions: 'The continued decline of political trust has also contaminated public confidence in other key political institutions with only five rating above 50 per cent – police, military, civic wellbeing organisations (e.g. community services), universities and health care institutions. Trust was lowest in political parties (16 per cent) and web-based media (20 per cent). Trust in banks and web-based media have significantly decreased since the last survey'.<sup>4</sup>

When compared with the 28 countries in the European Union, only three of those countries have a lower trust score than Australia. They are Spain, Italy and Greece.

These two graphs tell the story:

*Q: How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?*<sup>5</sup>

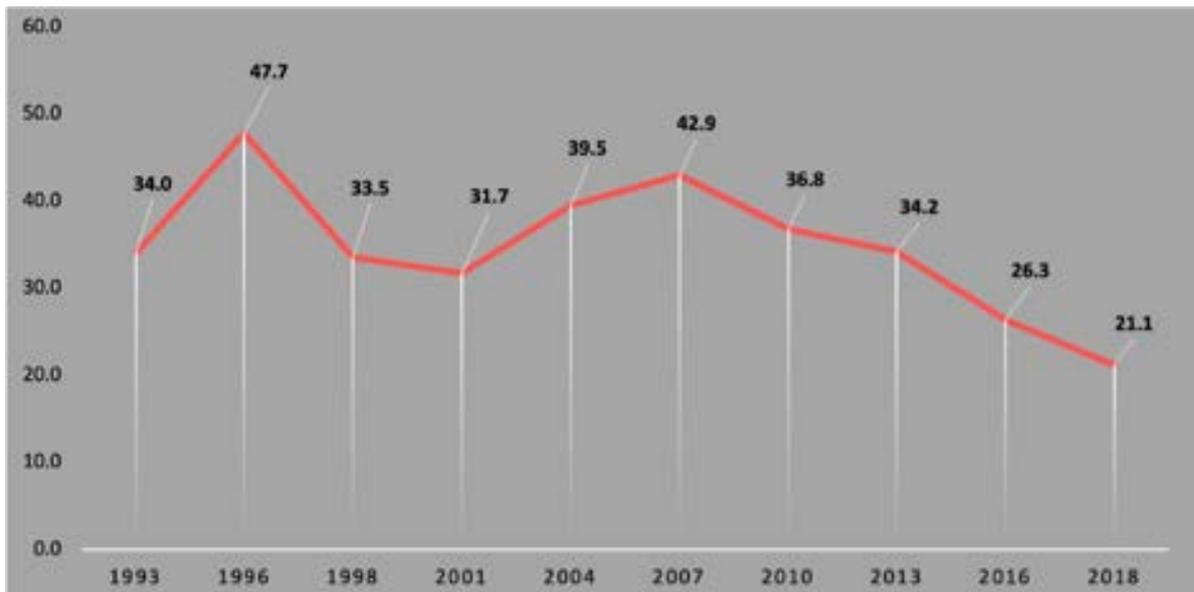


<sup>3</sup> Democracy 2025. *Trust and Democracy in Australia*, Museum of Australian Democracy. December 2018. p. 9

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 10

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 21

Q: How much do you personally trust politicians?<sup>6</sup>



The Global Financial Crisis of 2007-8 (GFC) was something of a turning point, coming after the events of September 11, 2001 and preceding the ensuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with the commitment of Australian troops. The GFC marked the end of continued economic growth in Australia which had assured young people that their lives were likely to be better and more prosperous than that of their parents. Ever since the end of World War II that had been the narrative and the dream. With opportunity, education, and hard work, anyone was assured the hope of a better future. Politics was seen as the icing on the cake. The cake was economic development assured by a free market. Politicians were those entrusted with letting the market decide the value of almost any public good. It could not last. As Pope Francis says in *Fratelli Tutti*:

The marketplace, by itself, cannot resolve every problem, however much we are asked to believe this dogma of neoliberal faith. Whatever the challenge, this impoverished and repetitive school of thought always offers the same recipes. Neoliberalism simply reproduces itself by resorting to the magic theories of 'spillover' or 'trickle' - without using the name - as the only solution to societal problems..... The fragility of world systems in the face of the pandemic has demonstrated that not everything can be resolved by market freedom. It has also shown that, in addition to recovering a sound political life that is not subject to the dictates of finance, 'we must put human dignity back at the centre and on that pillar build the alternative social structures we need'. (#168)

Until the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Australians had profited from the bipolar world, enjoying the protection and security of the US Alliance. After the destruction of the World Trade Centre, Australia's political leaders when committing troops to Iraq and Afghanistan

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 22

provided neither a clear narrative justifying Australian involvement nor an exit strategy. Meanwhile China was on the rise, and Australian politicians were anxious to avoid having to choose between their US ally and their Chinese business partner. Australians started feeling less secure.

Political leaders resonated with the concerns of citizens, particularly young people, who were troubled by climate change and the long term prospects for the planet. The Australian economy was dependent on coal exports, especially to China. In March 2007, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd speaking at a National Climate Summit declared climate change to be 'the great moral challenge of our generation'. Since then, Australia has had six prime ministers, none of whom has been able to find a resolution of the conflicting claims of climate change and an economic energy policy. The churning of prime ministers has been exacerbated by the divisions and disagreements over climate change. The political challenge was well described by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si*:

A politics concerned with immediate results, supported by consumerist sectors of the population, is driven to produce short-term growth. In response to electoral interests, governments are reluctant to upset the public with measures which could affect the level of consumption or create risks for foreign investment. The myopia of power politics delays the inclusion of a far-sighted environmental agenda within the overall agenda of governments. ...True statecraft is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good. Political powers do not find it easy to assume this duty in the work of nation-building.' (#178)

Some citizens committed to resolute action on climate change lost faith in the two major political party groupings (Labor and Liberal/National) and put their faith in the Greens who held some seats in the Senate, the upper house of the Parliament. The Greens and others on the cross benches in the Senate were able to exert some pressure on the government of the day. But more often than not, the Greens made the political mistake of the perfect being the enemy of the good. When the Rudd Government proposed an emissions trading scheme (ETS), the Greens rejected it, together with the conservative opposition. The conservatives thought the ETS went too far, while the Greens were convinced it did not go far enough. So we ended up with nothing, and many citizens, especially the young, became very disillusioned with the political process.

The loss of trust in the major political parties came at a time when citizens also had cause to lose trust in other major institutions. A five year royal commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse revealed major shortcomings in churches and other organisations which provided services to children. The Catholic Church, the largest Church in Australia and the largest church provider of health, education and welfare services, was shown to be particularly derelict in the way it dealt with complaints of abuse prior to 1996. There then followed a royal commission into the banks and major financial institutions. They too were found to be very untrustworthy. In more recent times, royal commissions into aged care and

into the provision of disability services have shown major shortcomings, further eroding public trust in institutions.

One result of these commissions of inquiry is that the voice of the churches and of social services providers has become more muted in the public square. In the past, this voice could be expected to call politicians and the major political parties to account for their shortcomings, especially when they were overlooking the needs and aspirations of the poor and marginalised.

The advent of social media and communications outlets such as Facebook and Google opened up many possibilities for increased communication. But at the same time, there was a hollowing out of the mainstream media and a concentration of media ownership. This has contributed to a decline in the quality and breadth of journalism needed to keep the public informed and to hold politicians to account.

As people have lost trust in major political parties, they have also lost trust or abandoned their reliance on the mainstream media outlets. Increasingly they prefer to access like-minded sources of information on the internet, Twitter, Instagram et al. Even well-educated citizens who are busy and pressed for time listen to their preferred podcasts or read their preferred blogs which tend to confirm their own presuppositions which over time morph into prejudices. This isolation amongst likeminded consumers can contribute to 'identity politics' and a sense of victimhood.

In Australia, voting is compulsory, and that is a good thing. Political parties do not have to spend vast resources urging citizens to perform their civic duty. But increasingly, citizens are wondering about the utility of voting, especially for the major political parties. Minor political parties always have a role to play in shifting the parameters of debate on issues which fit within the particular niche of those parties. But it is essential for the future of Australian democracy that the major parties retain sufficient public appeal, spared from the corruption of reliance on large scale donors and of branch stacking by unscrupulous party officials.

In the past, the two major political party groupings in Australia have provided the basis for healthy debate with one party's philosophical base preferencing labour over capital and community over the individual, and the other party's philosophical base preferencing capital over labour and the individual over community. Within each major party, there would then be factions or groupings able to argue out policy options reaching the necessary compromises premised on the philosophical base.

A major challenge to the future of Australian democracy is the health of these major parties. If they lose their appeal for new members and new voters, the work of deliberative debate and compromise will need to be done not *within* parties with protagonists sharing a basic political philosophy and values, but *amongst* parties with protagonists representing interests rather than values. Democracy will have no future unless there are more citizens prepared to see politics as a vocation, not a path to individual wealth, power and status. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis enunciates that challenge:

[P]olitics is something more noble than posturing, marketing and media spin. These sow nothing but division, conflict and a bleak cynicism incapable of mobilizing people to pursue a common goal. At times, in thinking of the future, we do well to ask ourselves, 'Why I am doing this?', 'What is my real aim?' For as time goes on, reflecting on the past, the questions will not be: 'How many people endorsed me?', 'How many voted for me?', 'How many had a positive image of me?' The real, and potentially painful, questions will be, 'How much love did I put into my work?' 'What did I do for the progress of our people?' 'What mark did I leave on the life of society?' 'What real bonds did I create?' 'What positive forces did I unleash?' 'How much social peace did I sow?' 'What good did I achieve in the position that was entrusted to me?' (#197)

Other challenges to the future of Australian democracy include the legitimacy of the nation state while the plight of the Indigenous people remains inadequate on all available social indicators and without any formal recognition of the Indigenous people in the Constitution. Australia being a nation of migrants founded on the dispossession of the Indigenous people, the country needs a migration policy which is transparent, coherent, and balanced providing places for business migration, family reunion, and humanitarian assistance, including appropriate burden sharing in receiving refugees and asylum seekers whose applications are accorded the rule of law. Australia does not have a national Human Rights Act nor a bill of rights in its Constitution. But Australia has been faithful in signing up to all key international human rights instruments and then enacting appropriate domestic legislation. Populist sentiment and national exceptionalism sometimes dictate against Australia being an optimal international citizen for human rights.

Australia, like all countries, needs to ensure that the rights and liberties of citizens, especially the poor and marginalised are protected from interference by government even when, or especially when, that government has the backing of populist sentiment in the parliament. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis says:

Lack of concern for the vulnerable can hide behind a populism that exploits them demagogically for its own purposes, or a liberalism that serves the economic interests of the powerful. In both cases, it becomes difficult to envisage an open world that makes room for everyone, including the most vulnerable, and shows respect for different cultures. (#155)

The COVID pandemic and the resultant deep recession of the world's strongest economies remind us that there are challenges to survival and human flourishing which cannot be met effectively only by nations going it alone. If there had been a higher level of international co-operation at the outset of this pandemic, much grief could have been avoided. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis puts the challenge repeating his call for reform of 'the United Nations Organization, and likewise of economic institutions and international finance, so that the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth'. He calls for 'clear legal limits to avoid power being co-opted only by a few countries and to prevent cultural impositions or a restriction of the basic freedoms of weaker nations on the basis of ideological differences'. He

repeats the vision of the UN 'as the development and promotion of the rule of law, based on the realization that justice is an essential condition for achieving the ideal of universal fraternity.' (#173)

With his ever practical bent and use of simple images, Pope Francis puts the challenge for the politician committed to healing democracy in an era of authoritarianism and populism:

If someone helps an elderly person cross a river, that is a fine act of charity. The politician, on the other hand, builds a bridge, and that too is an act of charity. While one person can help another by providing something to eat, the politician creates a job for that other person, and thus practices a lofty form of charity that ennobles his or her political activity. (#186)

Even those of us who live in the most successful 'full democracies' need politicians who see it as their vocation to build those bridges and create those jobs for everyone in the community so that citizens can see the benefit in political participation, the obligation to challenge authoritarian governments, and the need to avoid populism which ultimately places at risk the dignity and rights even of those who are in the majority.

*Original in English*



## Democratic Deficit – Meanderings in Myanmar

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Myanmar (formerly Burma), known for her vibrancy in her name as *the Golden Land* for her pristine Buddhist tradition and plentiful natural resources, was once the richest nation in South East Asia. Culturally she has been a colourful country with eight major tribes and 135 sub tribes. But, today her reputation is shattered and has become a 'burning Myanmar' in the eyes of the world!

### Looking at our Context

It is in this context, the incongruity of Myanmar is self-evident. Blessed with immense natural wealth, one of the mineral-rich countries in South East Asia, it remains officially the least developed country.<sup>1</sup> A country that follows a graceful religious tradition of Theravada Buddhism is also accused of religious extremism and violent monks.<sup>2</sup> The country where the pacifist Buddhism pervades and is known for Ngapha theela (five moral precepts) that demands "no-violence even in thoughts" is accused of crimes against humanity in dealing with the Rohingyas.<sup>3</sup> Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the once deified democratic icon and a Nobel Prize winner for peace, went to the international court of Justice<sup>4</sup>, shocking her western admirers, on a mission to defend the army which incarcerated her in her long struggle for democracy.

The ultimate incongruity is the most popular leader elected through a free and fair election is not allowed official power in the governance. The democratic deficit is embedded in the Constitution.<sup>5</sup> Despite the massive verdict in its favour, the National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, had to share power with the non-democratic army. The story of Myanmar Democracy is the story of repeated miscarriages. In the last seven decades

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category-myanmar.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13537113.2017.1344764?journalCode=fnep20>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/icc-approves-probe-myanmar-alleged-crimes-rohingya-191114162419921.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/10/world/asia/aung-san-suu-kyi-myanmar-genocide-hague.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aseaneconomist.com/myanmars-democratic-deficit/>

attempts at democracy were aborted at least three times. The present government was duly elected through huge popular vote.

Hopes that Myanmar would wean away from dark days of hate filled collusion of religious and military elites fell through when the world watched with horror, the forceful expulsion of nearly 700,000 Rohingya Muslims.<sup>6</sup> The UN High Commissioner for Human rights termed it as 'textbook case of ethnic cleansing.'<sup>7</sup> What came as a shock was the Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, once revered in the West as the democratic icon and the democratically elected leader of Myanmar, playing the role of defender in the International Court of Justice defending the army that subverted democracy for decades and even nullified by her elections once. This act was termed by the New York Times as a metamorphosis of 'an imprisoned opposition leader to apologist for some of this century's worst human rights violations.'<sup>8</sup> Myanmar is accused of denying democratic rights even under the elected civilian government, terming the present arrangement of army and civilian governance as "The Dual Fronts of Myanmar's Authoritarianism."<sup>9</sup> The army, which holds great power, refuses to give up its role, occupying 25 percent of the parliament and controlling many important ministries. Its enduring interest in the extract industry and the economy of the country is well documented by both Global witness and also Amnesty international.<sup>10</sup>

### **Loss of Democracy & Emergence of split Government**

When we observe the world globally we realize that the rise of nationalistic populism is diluting democracy all over. Democracies are turning into illiberal democracies, proving what the totalitarian regimes could not do, authoritarian democracy could do. Myanmar had nearly six decades of totalitarianism, military junta control. The military drew a constitution and went through the motions of a referendum, when the country was in the throes of a major natural calamity and had not allowed the elected civilian government to reform its embedded constitutional injustice.<sup>11</sup> The army thwarted democratic initiatives twice in history and the civilian government is cautious not to have another agonizing relapse into junta rule. Military generals have always defined democracy couched in the mysterious concept of 'disciplined democracy' an incremental democracy. The army imposed constitution is candid clear with two non-negotiable principles:

- The maintenance of stability, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, i.e. no "dangerous" concessions to the minorities.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>

<sup>7</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/564622-un-human-rights-chief-points-textbook-example-ethnic-cleansing-myanmar>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/10/world/asia/aung-san-suu-kyi-myanmar-genocide-hague.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://international.thenewslens.com/article/124810>, Khin Zaw Win, *The Dual fronts of Myanmar's authoritarianism*. 17 Sep 2019

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/2969/2020/en/>

<sup>11</sup> Myanmar's army blocks constitutional reforms, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2020/03/12/myanmars-army-blocks-constitutional-reforms>

- The perpetuation of the military's role in governance, as a check on supposed civilian incompetence, and the safeguarding of its corporate interests.<sup>12</sup>

This disciplined democracy was birthed through controversy. The first civilian government was headed by a former general who changed his uniform to become the first president, while the civilian leader was qualified on technicalities. A free and fair election was held in 2015 that brought Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to power without official recognition. The constitution ensured an “**Entrenched Dysfunction of the State,**”<sup>13</sup> leaving Myanmar with what was in effect a split government – nominally democratic and led by civilians, but with the military securely immersed in the country's politics, governance and economy.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto civilian leader of this nation, is venerated by most of the Myanmar people for her inspiring struggle for democracy. Many think she is playing a balancing role in preventing a relapse of Myanmar into authoritarian rule. The military that ruled this country with an iron hand for nearly six decades had usurped power twice from democratically elected leaders. It was legitimate to fear that the military would reverse the transition toward democracy if the democratically elected government challenged its authority.<sup>14</sup>

But history is a merciless judge and refuses to be silent. The events in Rakhine have raised troubling questions for her democratic and human rights credentials. As she faces the second election questions are raised about her capacity to represent all people of Myanmar.

### **Wounded - Need of Reconciliation and Healing**

The country's history is a wounded history. The decolonization struggle saw the fascist Japan playing a major role. During the Second World War Myanmar was the eastern theatre of war. Soon after the independence, the core group of freedom heroes was assassinated. The weakened first civil government faced intense armed struggle from ethnic and left armies. Unable to contain the insurgency, the civilian government handed over power to the army. Afterwards the army refused to accept the elected government twice in its history. The country is in war with some of the ethnic groups for the last six decades producing huge numbers of refugees and internally displaced people. The military dictatorship that ruled for six decades with an iron fist and a weird philosophy of Burmese way to Socialism, impoverished everyone.

Democracy came as a dream. But its path the last one decade was torturous. The threat of homogeneous nationalism and religious extremism are real resulting in the shocking expulsion of Rohingyas. The rise of nationalistic populism, abetted by social media, has raised concerns whether Myanmar Has Blazed a Path to Democracy without Rights.<sup>15</sup>

This dilution of democracy in Myanmar happened through many processes.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://teacircleoxford.com/2015/12/08/myanmar-still-a-disciplined-democracy/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://teacircleoxford.com/2015/12/08/myanmar-still-a-disciplined-democracy/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/16/myanmar-democracy-rohingya/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/16/myanmar-democracy-rohingya/>

1. *Exclusivist ethnocentric nationalism – conflict between complementary and competitive nationalism framework.*
2. *The minority complex of the majority community.*
3. *The global Islamophobia.*
4. *Rising religious extremism and violence of the religious elite.*
5. *The Globalization and the process of scapegoating.*
6. *The compulsions of the majority vote bank in democratic elections.*

Triggered by the fear of globalization and a democratic fatigue, “Autocratic nationalism has a banner year”.<sup>16</sup> How to explain this surge?

Political scientists like Marc Helbling<sup>17</sup> present a framework for nationalism and democracy. The theory proposed is nationalism and democracy are not mutually exclusive. There are two approaches: a complementarity of nationalism strengthening democracy. The extreme spectrum is nationalism and democracy constantly in conflict. Sadly, Myanmar has taken the negative aspects of competitiveness. It is a multicultural, multi ethnic society. Instead of taking an integrative inclusive, heterogeneous national identity, the ruling elites embedded discrimination into the constitution it imposed on the country. It presumed evolution of a ‘cultural homogeneity’ is vital to a liberal democracy. But Myanmar is a country of nations and nationalisms. That explains the chronic wars and violent resistance of many ethnic groups to accept the majoritarian cultural homogeneity discourse.

In the 1960s Myanmar’s ruling elite changed the nature of Burma through burmanization attempting violent assimilation of ethnic communities into the majority community (Burman) into the majority religion (Buddhism) and into the majority language (Burmese).

### **Future Obstacles and Challenges**

Burmanization has been the foundational strategy of the ruling and religious elite. The emergence of an extreme group Ma Pa Tha (Race, language and Religion) strongly advocates a nation built on homogenization and assimilation.<sup>18</sup>

Theravada Buddhism is a graceful religion with their huge number of monks providing witness to compassionate life. A fringe group has emerged stoking fundamentalist fire with narratives of hatred against minorities. The role of The Buddhist nationalism in Priyanka and

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.justsecurity.org/62231/2019-global-march-authoritarianism-turn-stampede-slog/>

<sup>17</sup> Helbling, Marc (2009). Nationalism and Democracy: Competing or Complementary Logics? *Living Reviews in Democracy*. Center for Comparative and International Studies, ETH Zurich and University of Zurich. [https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/cis-dam/CIS\\_DAM\\_2015/WorkingPapers/Living\\_Reviews\\_Democracy/Helbling\\_updated.pdf](https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/cis-dam/CIS_DAM_2015/WorkingPapers/Living_Reviews_Democracy/Helbling_updated.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <https://teacircleoxford.com/2019/12/02/is-this-the-end-of-ma-ba-tha/> Is this the end of Ma Ba Tha? by Matthewjwalton.

Myanmar with their anti-Muslim rhetoric has shocked the world. Politicization of religion has proved a curse to South Asia and South East Asia, threatening societies like Myanmar.<sup>19</sup>

The frightening prospect of religion being used as a diluting tool of democracy has its roots in globalization and global Islamophobia. Western countries conflict with Islam has political dividends for autocrats masquerading as the protectors of the western civilization. But this discourse has licensed autocrats to unleash an anti-Muslim attack. Religious fundamentalists join hands with autocratic rulers, both in India and Myanmar against the innocent Muslims. What has happened to Rohingya Muslims is influenced by global islamophobia. Religious extremists have perfected a narration of victimhood that celebrates the minority complex of the majority community, as the Hindu fundamentalists of India raise the bogey of the International Islamic alliance. A similar discourse is mainstreamed by religious bigots in Srilanka and Myanmar against the same minorities.

Globalization and its discontents as the Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz termed it, brought enormous wealth to the very few. The ontological anxiety created by unjust globalization has left billions of people on the way. Rising tides did not lift all the boats.

Myanmar faced it differently. A resource rich countries' resources were looted by cronies and their masters who ruled this country. Myanmar is desperately poor, with nearly 40 percent living in poverty. In the state of Rakhine, from where the Rohingya Muslims were expelled, poverty hovered around 60 percent, accentuating collective ontological anxieties. One of the richest mineral countries in the world hosts one of the poorest populations. After 60 years of totalitarian rule, millions are still migrant workers in the neighbouring countries. These swelling anxieties need drainage. As the social scientist Appadurain pointed out "Minorities are the major site for displacing the anxieties of many states about their own minority or marginality (real or imagined) in a world of a few mega states, of unruly economic flows and compromised sovereignties."<sup>20</sup> As elsewhere Muslims and other minorities fill this slot.<sup>21</sup>

### **Need of a Global Governance Institution**

One of the autocratic rulers like Donald Trump has unleashed a war of "globalists Vs nationalists." This acrimonious war has resulted in withdrawal from global treaties like Paris Climate Conference and WHO. The systematic erosion of the economic sovereignty built into the narrative of globalization has enslaved countries like Myanmar to Super powers like China. The ethical mandate of the existing global institutions like the UN is eroded by colonization of Super Powers, necessitating new global governance arrangements based on 'peoples' representation and participation. Pope Francis has become the global conscience keeper with his relentless campaign for economic and environmental justice, fair trade and

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<sup>19</sup> A comparative study of Buddhist nationalistic movements in Myanmar and Sri Lanka: A case study on the 969 movement in Myanmar and the Bodu Bala Sena in Sri Lanka Yifan Zhang Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University.

<sup>20</sup> Appadurai, Arjun. (2006). *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay On the Geography of Anger*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>21</sup> East Asia Forum. (November 4, 2015). "Are Myanmar's Monks Hindering Democratization?" <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/11/04/aremyanmars-monks-hindering-democratisation>

rights of migrants. Catholic Church has arrived at the critical juncture of history in animating all religious and non-religious forces to establish new global institutions of Justice.

Information technology has created a new virtual world beyond border 'netizens' etc. We are not only responsible for our own citizens, but to all those who we communicate.

Globalization had weaved ontological anxieties into old cultures. Culturally rich Buddhist countries perceive globalization as a great threat to identity. In an era of globalization, which "has eroded settled connections between territory and identity, a threatened majority can turn predatory by creating fears of a minority group taking over the country from the demographic majority."<sup>22</sup> This has happened in Myanmar and in Srilanka.

This crisis offers a great opportunity. A new global citizenship based not on culture or territory but on shared values of Justice will ensure a sustainable economic and environmental future.

### **Role of the Church and the Society of Jesus**

It is good to remember that the Church was one of the earliest global organizations. Jesuits were at the forefront of globalization. New worlds were 'discovered' new trade routes were formed. So the Church was also one of the first global societies with shared values. So the Church is not in an uncharted territory. Covid-19 has taught us, in the words of Pope Francis, "We are all in the same boat"<sup>23</sup> while experiencing the same storm. An invisible virus has become an invincible enemy of humanity. Borders collapse and Super powers are brought to their knees. The Church moral voice on behalf of those left out continues to rise from the Vatican. Under the leadership of the Pope, the Church needs to animate the world community.

Illiberal democracies pose a great threat to human dignity and solidarity. Religious fundamentalism has become a political tool. The majoritarian discourse is a vote bank strategy in many countries.

With the collapse of the left, the voice for the poor is silenced in many countries. We, as Jesuits, men and women of the Church, need to return to the poor. Autocrats and extremists have perfected the narratives of hatred and have entered the central stage. Surprisingly in this digital age, stories are retold to mobilize hate, not for love and justice. Retelling the stories of the vulnerable is the art taught by Jesus – as he did with the Samaritan woman and Zacchaeus. Jesuits need narratives, stories, and dreams of a new world order where there will be 'no more tears.' Jesuits retold the stories of the people of the world, enriching cultures, affirming common humanity. The rise and arrogance of nationalistic monsters and religious bigots is the failure of liberal minds, often trapped into ad nauseam repeated clichés ending up as technocrats.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/globalization-and-threat-democracy>

<sup>23</sup> <https://religionnews.com/2020/03/27/pope-francis-only-together-we-can-do-this-during-extraordinary-indulgence-ceremony/>

The urgent need of Jesuits and others interested in strengthening democracy and justice for the vulnerable, is to learn a new language of narrative.<sup>24</sup> The art of narrative is lost in us and the progressives. As Krizna Gomez crisply points out:

The reason that bodies like the European Union, and even human rights activists, are struggling to respond to populist attacks is that they have become technocrats: they are detached from communities, they speak in jargon no one else understands and they promote policies that are often decided in spaces which most people cannot enter.

This is the alienation from street idiom which is a major challenge. Returning to the language of the people and telling stories of hope will save democracy and a future of justice. So, let us dream of a justice based democracy in Myanmar!

*Original in English*

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/frontline-insights/why-do-progressive-movements-struggle-answer-populists-because-they-are-technocrats/>



## Addressing Hunger to Protect Democracy

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### Introduction

In a pastoral letter dated 16<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) affirmed its support to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) towards the latter's call to prayer. But as pundits started reacting to the letter, many started to ask: But a prayer for what? And a prayer for whom?

Upon closer inspection, it was a prayer in support of the people of Hongkong who were fighting for their basic freedoms and human rights. This was done in the context of the signing into law by Hongkong's legislators of the National Security Act. Many pro-democracy citizens of Hongkong – prominent among who is the entrepreneur Jimmy Lai - feared that such a law curtailed on their democratic freedoms. Most Rev. Pablo "Ambo" David, the acting CBCP president and main author of the letter echoed such a sentiment. The good bishop cited similarities between the Philippine situation and that of Hongkong. You see, the Philippine congress also recently signed into law the Anti-Terror Act of 2020. Bishop Ambo took this cue to give an analogy of the proverbial frog<sup>1</sup> in reference to the undermining of democratic institutions in the Philippines for the past couple of years now.

Bishop Ambo then made a salient point on how those in public service – referring to officials of the executive, judicial and legislative branches in government – are an essential key to a stable and functional democratic system. As a way forward, the seeming intent behind the CBCP call to prayer was directed to a continuing conversion for both state and its citizenry, which admittedly, the Catholic Church is very much part of. The question begged to be asked then was, a conversion to what? Although the CBCP letter was explicit in its demand towards the common good, this was received differently to varying degrees by those who were in support of, and those who were against the incumbent Philippine president, Rodrigo Duterte.

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted directly from the CBCP Pastoral Letter, "While a semblance of democracy is still in place and our democratic institutions somehow continue to function, we are already like the proverbial frog swimming in a pot of slowly boiling water." (<https://cbcnews.net/cbcnews/a-pastoral-letter-and-a-call-to-prayer/>)

Those who were for the current administration argued that common good was being used by the church to skirt over the separation of church and state problematic; while those who were against countered that common good provided the underpinning of the safe and democratic space which made possible the debate/dialogue of expressing one's voice in the first place. Many key stakeholders of the Catholic Church – mostly religious and lay leaders in its educational institutions – thus rallied behind this call to conversion in support of democratic institutions. Given that patriotism – that is, a deep love of country – is not and should not be a monopoly of the state alone, or its citizens, this became a very divisive issue and was mostly evident in the battle lines drawn on social media. Trolls and Elves – depending on who was supporting which and whom – attacked the other side with such venom and rage that lost in this vitriolic debate was a very disturbing narrative: during this time of the pandemic, a third of the country's population was going hungry<sup>2</sup>. Looking at the country's storied past, this has been a constant refrain and debate by historians and economists in how the style of governance has made an impact on poverty alleviation/reduction on its people.

It is in view of this hunger and this history that had me reflecting on what I perceive as two main threats to genuine democracy in the Philippine setting: authoritarianism and poverty. In turn, these threats are compounded by what I perceive as two hungers: *the hunger to be heard* and the *hunger to be fed*. Although both seem not related at first, I would like to believe that the inability to address one aggravates the other. Going beyond the debate on which hunger to address first, I would like to use the discourse of rights based approaches (RBA) as lens in order to propose and recommend role of the Catholic Church as a duty bearer of such economic and civil rights. Applied in the Philippine situation – and as highlighted in this time of the Covid 19 pandemic – I would like to believe that such a role in addressing these two 'hungers' can help protect Philippine democracy against the twin threats of a creeping authoritarianism and a growing poverty.

### **The Catholic Church and Rights Based Approaches (RBA)**

To situate the Catholic Church in RBA discourse is to highlight its history in its defense of human rights. But before doing so, perhaps a brief review of the history of how the discourse on RBA in general and human rights in particular emerged can help contextualize this.

The concept of human rights can trace its origins to two human rights revolutions<sup>3</sup>. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) back in 1948 was actually only the second human rights revolution in history coming after the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the French Declaration of Rights [of Man] in 1789. In both prior revolutions, the concept of 'rights' was seen to be intertwined with the concept of 'social contract'. As the first human rights revolution reversed the social contract between the "rights" of rulers and the

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<sup>2</sup> In a survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS), hunger in the Philippines was reported at a new record high, affecting 30.7% of Philipino families.

(<https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldisppage/?artcsyscode=ART-20200927135430>)

<sup>3</sup> In their book, "Reinventing Development: Translating Rights Based Approaches from Theory into Practice" Paul Gready and Jonathan Ensor (2005) argue that not only is human rights reinventing development, but that development is also reinventing human rights.

“duties” of subjects, so had the second human rights revolution highlighted the social contract between the “rights” of claimants and the “duties” of providers. Interestingly, during the French revolution, the church was perceived to side with the ruling class as the lines then seem blurred concerning church state relations. This gradually led to the ‘dechristianization’ of Western Europe which has had its lingering effects – for better or for worse – in the perception the Roman Catholic Church holds to this day.

The concept of RBA formally emerged in the post-communist era of the 1990’s amidst the continuing nexus of good governance, social contract and human rights. The contrasting ideological positions of communism and western liberal democracy had emphasized different rights and, thus, seemingly separated the rights provided for in the UDHR. The end of the cold war, however, merged the respective rights being advocated by the western liberal democratic countries (civil and political rights) and the eastern bloc of communist socialist countries (economic, social and cultural rights).

This integration of rights and social contract was especially highlighted in the 1990s when newly emerging countries from authoritarian regimes used their civil and political rights to demand their economic and cultural rights. Interestingly the proliferation of many an NGO and CSOs after the Philippine experience during the peaceful 1986 EDSA people power revolution seems to attest to this. But there has also emerged a critique that the failure of post EDSA Philippine governments to bridge the gap between material democracy (economic rights) and formal democracy (political rights) especially among its poor majority eventually gave rise to the current situation it faces. Simply put, the gains of democracy restored after the EDSA revolution did not translate even into poverty reduction; because the restoration of democracy has not benefitted the majority poor. Which again begs a soul- searching question for the Church in the Philippines: Where has the Catholic Church sided in such a democracy?

As a way forward, perhaps the Church in the Philippines can learn from history of the Church in her defense of human rights. In fact, a close relationship between the church<sup>4</sup> and the poor was highlighted in liberation theology back in the 1970’s which had her fighting for the ‘rights’ of the poor. The church affirmed this relationship when she aligned herself with the United Nations’ UDHR. In doing so, the church seemingly declared herself as a duty bearer<sup>5</sup> of these rights as well.

Traditionally, the church had addressed the needs of the poor from the perspective of charity and morality. But this paradigm had shifted from framing such ‘needs’ as ‘rights’ and

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<sup>4</sup> Here I define the church as a “community of persons, the believers and adherents of a specific religion, and the organization they have formed among themselves, which includes the leaders and members, their structure, and system of operations” as quoted by Ma. Lourdes Genato-Rebullida, 2006. “Religion, Church, and Politics in the Philippines” in T. Encarnacion Tadem and N. Miranda, eds., *Philippine Politics and Governance*. Quezon City: Department of Political Science, p.65

<sup>5</sup> Mikkelsen, Britha. (2005). “A Rights-based Approach to Development” in *Methods for Development Work and Research: A New Guide for Practitioners*. London: Sage, pp.199-216. According to Mikkelsen, there are three groups of agents recognized by human rights law: rights-holders, duty-bearers and other actors.

somehow it had also taken on the narrative as a duty bearer of such rights therefore<sup>6</sup>. But through the years such ideas continued to test reality. Having initiated feeding programs for malnourished poor children for example, can the church actually be obliged beyond morality, and be duty bound to address the claim of the parents of such children to gain a voice in fighting for civil rights, for example? Applied in the concrete, to what extent can the church actually draw the line between becoming a duty bearer of the economic right to food and shelter for urban poor communities to becoming a duty bearer of the political right to vote and critique government?

### **The Catholic Church as a Duty Bearer in Democracy**

In view of this problematic though, I would like to cite two clarifications in terms of the roles and responsibilities concerning the church becoming a duty bearer in its attempt to protect democracy in general, and in its relationship to the poor in particular. In turn, these can also serve as limitations and the parameters of my reflection.

First, although rarely mentioned specifically in development discourse, the church seems to have played an influencing role in the lives of the poor especially in countries of the global south. Various church documents<sup>7</sup> have continually attempted to define this role in the context of the separation of the church and state but a tension remains both from within and outside the church in the realm of power relationships. This had been the unique case in the Philippines, for example, during its post-authoritarianism period in the restoration of Philippine Democracy<sup>8</sup>. The tension is especially felt when the church becomes a political actor and deals with political ideologies<sup>9</sup>. In view of this tension, it has been argued to situate the church in relation with civil society<sup>10</sup>. Admittedly though, there is still the need to continually clarify the role of the church in the configuration of relationships among the state, civil society and the poor.

Secondly, because of the ambiguity of this role, as a way forward, there is a need to look beyond such roles and thus focus on clarifying responsibilities of key stakeholders (state, civil society and the church) instead, in their capacity as duty bearers. Articulating and delineating the responsibilities of such duty bearers can respond to unarticulated expectations by

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<sup>6</sup> Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace. (1975). "Assessment of Historical Developments and Current Standpoints" in *The Church and Human Rights*. Vatican City: Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace. pp. 22-27.

<sup>7</sup> I would deem church documents here in reference to papal encyclicals, pastoral letters, and other documents attributed to the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>8</sup> In his book, "Church, State, and Civil Society in Post-authoritarian Philippines" (2006). Ateneo de Manila Press), Antonio Moreno, SJ explored the concept of 'engaged citizenship' as way to navigate this tension

<sup>9</sup> Hanson, Eric. (1987). "Political Ideology: Catholicism, Socialism, and Capitalism" in *The Catholic Church in World Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp.95-122.

<sup>10</sup> Fergusson, David. (2006). "The Politics of Scripture" in *Church, State and Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.1-22. In proposing the church-civil society relationship, the author argues that with the end of Christendom casting the relationship between the church and state as two dominant institutions in close partnership is now outmoded and thus the need to turn to the concept of civil society.

claimants of rights. The opportunity for cooperative conflict either among duty bearers themselves or in their relationship with claimants thus seem to increase when responsibilities are made clear. This is especially helpful in cases when the poor in their capacity as right bearers have no voice in the process.

## **Conclusion**

Having clarified its possible role and responsibility as a duty bearer, I would like to deem the Catholic Church as a possible key player in protecting democracy against the threats of authoritarianism and poverty. This narrative remains open ended in the Philippines, however.

This becomes increasingly complex especially in the understanding of 'rights' and 'duties' when culture comes into play. This is because it seems in a democratic setting that the Philippines sides more with an oriental culture rather than a western one. Whereas individual rights and deontological duties are more prominent in western culture, Filipinos in general seem to relate more with the concept of communal rights and 'Confucian' duties.

With such awareness however, I would like to deem this as an advantage because perhaps the Philippine Catholic Church can help better define and defend its role to protect democracy. Coming from such an understanding of her role, the democratic principle of inclusivity can thus be better applied and suited to Philippine democracy. This is when the 'right to be heard' and 'right to be fed' becomes the responsibility of the community, rather than the individual. This has been highlighted in the Philippines especially in this time of the pandemic when institutions have been treated individually rather than communally.

In embracing its role as a duty bearer to address the 'right to be fed' by the poor (as concretized in the feeding programs catholic church parishes have initiated) perhaps the Catholic church can also embrace its role as a duty bearer to address the 'right to be heard' by the poor (as concretized in its becoming a credible 'critic' of anti-poor government policies, eg.) There remains the disconnect however as long as the Church - in its relation with the poor - does not realize that that 'right to be fed' entails the duty towards the 'right to be heard' and vice versa. When the Catholic Church in the Philippines - in practice - sides with the powerful few and minority elite in a democracy who are fed and heard, it should not expect the majority poor who are not fed and who are not heard to side with her in the fight for this democracy.

In short, the Catholic Church in the Philippines, needs to be hungry herself.

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