

Democracy in the 21st Century: Global Questions

In 1945, following several decades that saw most experiments in democratisation fail, there were only a dozen democracies left on the face of the earth. Since then, despite many ups and downs, democracy has bounced back from near oblivion to become a planetary phenomenon for the first time in its history (Diamond, 2008; Dunn, 2005; Keane, 2009). Fresh research perspectives on this sea change are required, and that is because the point has been reached where the language and institutions of democracy have taken root in so many different geographic contexts that several fundamental presuppositions of democratic theory have been invalidated. As democracy spread through the world, the world has made its mark on democracy, even though the metamorphosis has remained largely unregistered in the literature on democracy. I give two recent English examples: the effort of John Dunn (2005) to write a history of the word democracy ignores its pre-Greek origins, its survival in the early Muslim world, its earliest modern redefinition in the Low Countries, its penetration of the countries of Spanish America during the nineteenth century, and its more recent metamorphosis in contexts as different as southern Africa, Taiwan, Indonesia and India; and the influential textbook treatment by David Held (2006) of various 'models' of democracy that have a distinctively Eurocentric bent which precludes references to many anomalous cases, past and present.

Well into the twentieth century, analysts of democracy supposed that the functional prerequisites of democracy included (a) a 'sovereign' territorial state that guaranteed the physical security of a resident population of citizens; (b) a political culture favouring mechanisms that were widely supposed to be synonymous with democracy: competition among political parties, periodic elections and parliamentary government; (c) a more or less homogeneous social infrastructure or 'national identity' bound together by a common language, common customs and a common sense of shared history; and (d) an economy capable of generating wealth that lifted citizens out of poverty and guaranteed them a basic standard of living sufficient to enable them to take an interest in public affairs.

The grip of each of these supposed prerequisites has been broken during the past generation. The cases of India, Taiwan, South Africa, Botswana, Nepal and the Tibetan Government in Exile are just some of the anomalous cases that throw into disarray many presumptions about democracy in such disciplinary fields as political science, sociology, economics and international relations. In each case, the meaning of democracy and the ways in which it took root in local soils prompt brand new questions to do with what future research might call the *indigenisation of democracy*. This phrase refers to the manifold complex ways in which the language and institutions and normative ideals of democracy undergo mutations when they are carried more or less successfully into environments where previously they exercised little or no influence.

Indigenisation is always a complex and contested set of processes. What is arguably needed is a new 21st-century *political anthropology of democracy*: new approaches sustained by fresh perspectives, metaphors, theories and methods for making sense of the way in which democracy undergoes alteration when it takes root in unfamiliar soils. For this purpose, translation and other literary similes drawn from linguistic philosophy have sometimes been utilised, most notably in Frederic Schaffer's remarkable study of the ways in which Wolof and French speakers in Senegal, the country with the oldest tradition of multiparty government in Africa, adopted and transformed the European donor language of *démocratie* to make new sense of the importance of electoral practices within a culturally divergent society that calls itself a *demokaraasi* (Schaffer, 1998). Some scholars have adapted an approach, outlined by Michel de Certeau, to examine the ways in which the tactical appropriation of a technical procedure like the secret ballot is always a creative 'theatrical' performance that results unpredictably in long-lasting changes in its functioning (Bertrand, Briquet, Pels, 2007). Other literature (to take a third example) has relied on the language of mutations, mutagens and other terms drawn from evolutionary biology within the field of the biosciences (Keane, 2009: 673-86). In contrast to political science approaches that emphasise aggregate trends guided by teleology ('liberal democracy' as the 'end of history'; Fukuyama, 1992) or by maritime metaphors (most influential has been the 'third wave' approach; Huntington, 1991), this third alternative examines changes in the language and institutions of democracy by drawing loose analogies with those sudden or more protracted mutations in the inherited characteristics of the cells of organisms deep down within the earth's biosphere. The reasoning of this approach is that mutations sometimes transcend unfitness and consequent death, and can be beneficial; they sometimes produce organisms much better adapted to their environment (here there are clear implications for theories of democratisation), in which case the process of competitive selection enables the altered gene to be passed on successfully to subsequent generations. These beneficial mutations turn out to be the raw material of evolution and adaptation to changing environments.

Analogies drawn from linguistics, theatre and evolutionary biology must be handled with great care - and keen awareness of their limitations. But in pursuit of new ways of analysing and evaluating the global processes by which democratic languages and institutions become 'embedded' (Merkel, 2004) in particular contexts, one thing seems abundantly clear: the field is wide open for creating novel metaphors, fresh interpretations and original case studies that add significance to the thesis of indigenisation and in turn force the refinement of our understanding of democracy, past and present. Much can arguably be learned (to mention a few possible examples) from the reinterpretation of efforts to nurture democracy on 'foreign soils', including Athenian efforts at 'democracy promotion'; the invention of the norms and institutions of representative democracy in France and their diffusion to the British colonies and Spanish America (Hirst, 2002; Keyssar, 2000; Rosanvallon, 1992, 1998, 2000, 2004); and the colonial roots of democratisation in Taiwan, China and Japan during the last great growth spurt of globalisation that lasted roughly from 1870 to 1930 (Rwei-Ren Wu, 2003; Chang, 1971; Ike, 1950; Dower, 2000). There is scope as well for the reinterpretation of the spread of new forms of democracy in the current round of globalisation, including much-neglected cases that include India, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania and the world of Muslim societies (Guha, 2007; Reilly, 2001; Scheps, 2000; Keane, 2009; Sadiki, 2009). The conventional accounts of the coming of federalist visions of democracy to Australia - to take just one further example - also seem ripe for reinterpretation along these lines. The standard narrative is that the piecemeal colonisation of the continent propelled the conjoining of the various colonies into a new federation, as if through an act of historical inevitability. It turns out that the nineteenth-century push towards federation was the contested resultant of many forces, including post-1776 reassessments of British views of empire, the resistance of local

colonists, visions inspired by the American ‘compound republic’ (Madison) and decentralist initiatives guided by the mental maps and patterns of movement of aboriginal peoples (Brown, 2004)

Monitory Democracy

New research on the indigenisation of democracy is bound to raise questions about how to construct meaningful time periods within the history of democracy. For instance, when historians look back on the early years of the 21st-century, will they categorise existing forms of democracy differently than we currently do? Among contemporary journalists, politicians, scholars and other analysts of democracy it is customary to speak of ‘liberal democracy’, ‘Western democracy’, ‘parliamentary democracy’ and other epithets. These phrases arguably function as living-dead ‘zombie’ categories that have the effect of suppressing the novel dynamics that are unfolding within actually existing democracies. Alternative approaches are needed to make sense of these original tendencies of our age.

An example: the theory of ‘monitory democracy’ draws strength from the historical observation that since 1945 a major sea change has been taking place in the real world of democracy (Keane, 2009). Post-electoral or ‘monitory’ democracy was born. A clue to its novelty is the invention of scores of power-scrutinising mechanisms - human rights organisations, summits, forums, integrity commissions, participatory budgeting and citizens’ assemblies - whose combined effect has been gradually to alter the political geometry and everyday dynamics of democracy. From this perspective, democracy is coming to mean much more than the periodic election of representatives to a parliament – though nothing less. In the new age of monitory democracy, or so this line of research suggests, elections still count, but parties and parliaments now have to compete with thousands of monitory organisations and networks that try to keep power on its toes. Political parties and parliaments find it hard to keep their fingers on the pulses of power. The old meaning of democracy as the periodic election of representatives based on the rule of one person, one vote, is replaced by democracy guided by a different and more complex rule: one person, many interests, many votes, many representatives, both at home and abroad.

The trend towards ‘post-electoral’ or ‘monitory’ democracy naturally prompts many difficult but highly interesting research questions. For example: what have been the principal drivers of the growth of extra-parliamentary scrutiny bodies? How are the different types of monitory mechanisms best catalogued (e.g., auditors-general and public enquiries are adjuncts to parliamentary assemblies, while other mechanisms, such as human rights campaigns, anti-corruption commissions and environmental watchdogs, operate at a distance from elected representatives, parliaments and incumbent governments)? Do these mechanisms compound the weaknesses of contemporary political parties and parliaments, forcing them further into decline? Can political parties, elected representatives and parliaments recover their powers, or are they fated to share power with *unelected* representatives whose public legitimacy stems from such criteria as subscription membership, ethical probity, media exposure and resilience in suffering?

Communication Media

The growth of specialised accountability institutions is evidently linked with the growth of new communication media. With few exceptions, the historical affinities between democracy and communication media are still poorly analysed in contemporary social science literature. Major research initiatives may profitably think of the affinities in the following way: ancient forms of assembly democracy belonged to an era dominated by the

spoken word, backed up by laws written on stone or papyrus, and by messages despatched by foot, or donkey and horse. Representative democracy in territorial state form sprang up in the age of *print culture* - the era of the printing press, the book, pamphlet, newspaper and novel, and telegraphed and mailed messages - and fell into crisis during the advent of early mass communication media, especially radio and television and cinema and (in its infancy) television. By contrast, or so the evidence suggests, contemporary forms of democracy are tied closely to the growth of *multi-media-saturated societies* - societies whose structures of power are continuously 'bitten' by monitory institutions operating within a new galaxy of media defined by the ethos of 'communicative abundance'.

Regardless of how the changing historical relationship between communication media and democracy is understood, many new questions are prompted by the contemporary trends. What are the distinctive qualities of the new galaxy of communication media? Is it best described in terms of overlapping and interlinked media devices that integrate texts, sounds and images and enable communication to take place through multiple user points, in chosen time, either real or delayed, within modularised and ultimately global networks that are affordable and accessible to many hundreds of millions of people scattered across the globe? Does this new age of communicative abundance produce disappointments, instability and harmful self-contradictions, for instance in the concentration of media capital, the commercialisation and erosion of private life, or in the widening power gaps between communication-rich and communication-poor, who seem almost unneeded as communicators, or as consumers of media products? Are the strongly generative qualities of the internet so vulnerable to degenerative trends (such as spyware, adware, spam, phishing, viruses and cyber-attacks) that new hierarchies of restricted public access 'gated communities' are likely to develop, so weakening the richly democratic effects of communicative abundance? Is disaffection with political parties, politicians and 'politics' a necessary effect of the new communication media, at least when compared with the era of representative democracy, when print culture and limited-spectrum audiovisual media were closely aligned with political parties and governments? How plausible is the suggestion that such disaffection is dangerous for democracy, simply because it can be tapped by authoritarian political leaders (Silvio Berlusconi, for instance) who use state-of-the-art rhetorical methods to convince people that their own interests are identical with those of the leader, so turning people into the satisfied and admiring People that the leader says they are (Eco, 2008; Ginsborg, 2005; Sartori, 2009).

Research on communicative abundance might also profitably concentrate on the past, present and future of journalism. Do democracies functionally require an 'unlovable press' (Schudson, 2009)? Is democracy compatible with red-blooded journalism concerned less with fact-based 'objectivity' (an ideal born of the age of representative democracy) and more with adversarial and 'gotcha' styles of commercial journalism driven by ratings, sales and hits? Is there substance to the widespread complaints that are directed at new-style 'churnalists' who hunt in packs, feed upon unconfirmed sources, spin titillating sensations and concentrate too much on personalities and events, rather than time-bound contexts? Does the new journalism - and the challenges posed to its authority by 'citizen journalists' - nevertheless add substance to democracy by giving a voice to 'ordinary people' talking publicly about their private fears, fantasies, hopes and expectations, and by making every 'private' nook and cranny of power the potential target of 'publicity' and 'public exposure', so encouraging citizens' suspicions of unaccountable power?

What about those moments when the public exposure of wrongdoing and poor decisions does not happen? Is it meaningful to speak of 'media decadence' (Keane, 2009) or 'media failures', those junctures when powerful organisations are not subject to public scrutiny, or when journalists are responsible for circulating firestorms of disinformation

around the globe many times before inaccuracies are corrected? Granted that the new communication media are marked by these and other structural defects, are there ways in which the quality of democracy can be enhanced (say) by fostering new business models and patterns of media ownership, or by reshaping the contours of journalism through new codes of conduct and new public expectations? What is the likely long-term impact of citizen journalists - those who operate through hand-held cameras, mobile phones, weblogs, tweets and social networking sites? Are they profoundly transforming the meaning of journalism; and, if so, do they on balance offer hope to those who are engaged in the political business of keeping reins on those who exercise power, or will they have the effect of disorientating, commercialising and ruining public life, as is sometimes alleged?

Markets and Democracy

The tensions between journalism and democracy are mired in a larger magnetic field: the potentially contradictory relationship between markets and democracy. New research initiatives in this force field are vital. From the early years of the nineteenth century, and especially during periods of capital disinvestment and mass unemployment, this relationship has often been a source of public disturbance. The recent global recession is no exception: it has had the effect of breathing new life into an old subject waiting for fresh research to happen.

Cutting-edge enquiries on the subject of markets and democracy might profitably reinterpret key historical cases. Investigations are likely to show that the standard formula, 'no bourgeois, no democracy' (Barrington Moore Jr., 1966: 418) is implausible; and that viable democratic political forms, such as citizens assemblies, public juries, political parties and periodic elections, are contingently related to a wide repertoire of property forms. The early Greek assembly democracies enjoyed a functional but tense relationship with commodity production and exchange; the life of (male) citizens was widely seen as standing in opposition to the production of the necessities of life in the sphere of the *oikos*. The modern forms of representative democracy that first sprang up in the Low Countries, at the end of the sixteenth century, were intimately bound up with profit-driven commodity production and exchange. Since that time, capitalist markets have proved to be a mixed blessing for democracy in representative form. The dynamism, technical innovation and enhanced productivity of (unconstrained) markets have been impressive. So, too, has been their rapaciousness, unequal (class-structured) outcomes, reckless exploitation of nature and their vulnerability to bubbles, whose inevitable bursting generates wild downturns that bring manias, fear and misery to people's lives, in the process destabilising democratic institutions, as last happened on a global scale during the 1920s and 1930s (Kindleberger and Aliber, 2005).

Future research might be guided by a handy formula: democracies can neither live with markets nor live without markets. The formula helps explain the wildly divergent political recommendations concerning markets and democracy. According to pro-market observers, political democracy distorts and paralyses the spirit and substance of rational calculations upon which markets functionally depend; understood as government based on majority rule, democracy is profoundly at odds with free competition, individual liberty and the rule of law. What is required is 'democratic pessimism' (Caplan, 2007) and the restriction of majority-rule democracy in favour of 'demarchy' (von Hayek, 1979), limited constitutional government whose job is to protect and nurture 'free markets'. Other observers stake out the contrary view: they maintain that market failures and 'externalities' require correction by political interventions that are based on popular consent and serve the ideals of equality, freedom and solidarity.

Exactly what this latter formula means in practice has been hotly disputed since the earliest (Chartist and co-operative movement) public attacks on markets in the name of democracy. The democratisation of markets has meant various things. For some analysts, democracy requires the replacement of markets by the principles of Humanity (Giuseppe Mazzini), or by visions of ‘social individuality’ (Karl Marx) and post-market individualism (C.B. Macpherson). Other analysts have championed social democratic proposals designed to ‘socialise’ the unjust effects of competition by ‘re-embedding’ markets within civil society institutions guaranteed by welfare states that protect and extend social citizenship rights (Marshall, 1950; Polanyi, 1945; Hall and Soskice, 2001).

It seems important to revisit policy thinking about the relationship between markets and democracy, if only to develop fruitful comparisons among contemporary Anglo-Saxon, Rhineland, Japanese, Indian, Chinese and other ‘varieties of capitalism’; and to craft new lines of research, for instance concerning the ill-understood phenomenon of *democracy failure* (Keane, 2009a). There is evidence, under certain conditions, that the absence of viable mechanisms of democratic representation can induce the breakdown of markets. Democracy failure can breed market failure. Research into a topical example might help to clarify the equation. For example, during the past several decades, especially in the Atlantic heartlands of the global banking and credit sector, the willingness of unelected regulatory bodies, elected governments and self-regulation agencies (such as Standard and Poor’s) to leave unchallenged the practice of dispersing credit risk by selling it to third-party investors produced undesirable consequences. Collateral debt obligations, mortgage-linked securities and other new-fangled instruments encouraged banks, investment firms and hedge fund operators to pursue reckless adventures that eventually had destabilising effects on the whole global economy. Among these effects is a raft of unanswered questions: can the quest to extract folly and hubris from capital markets, to rein in the ruinous power of foolishly inflated expectations, succeed? Are risk taking and (broken) promise making, for instance in the banking and credit sectors, by definition neither fully predictable nor controllable? If so, is the implication that capital markets cannot fully be guided by rational calculations that keep things in permanent equilibrium; and that, especially when left to their own devices, private banks and credit institutions will always retain the power to fuel major market movements that take on lives of their own, entrap investors in foolish illusions (J.M. Keynes called them animal spirits) that have the effect of seducing other market participants into expecting permanent gains - until feedback signals driven by actual underlying trends puncture the foolish illusions, at which point, a boom-bust sequence with incalculable effects takes hold? Assuming (therefore) the need for new early warning systems, can more democratic ways be found for doing things that central banks, bankers, securities regulators and accounting standards boards manifestly failed to do? Are democracies now witnessing first-ever attempts to build regional and global oversight structures in the fields of banking, insurance and securities – credible forums that would crack down on fraud, discourage excessive risk-taking, foster best practice through open-minded counsel and provide a means by which those hurt by this crisis may seek redress?

The Biosphere

It is commonly said that the bitter struggles for extending the vote to all classes and categories of people came to an end during the course of the twentieth century - that the question of the universal franchise is now settled. From this perspective, the matter of *who votes* has been replaced by questions concerning *where* people can or should vote (Bobbio, 1989). The great exception to this handy formula is the emergence of new battlefronts on the political terrain of the biosphere (Alonso, Keane and Merkel, 2010, esp. the contributions by

Robyn Eckersley and Michael Saward). Most democracies are nowadays preoccupied not merely with tough questions about the causes and effects of changes within the biosphere. The matter of how democracies can reverse, modify or adapt to these changes has prompted some activists and policymakers to suggest that the world of nature has political rights, in the sense that it is blessed with entitlements that require people to take care of the biosphere by finding ways of respecting and representing it through new modes of governance that are mindful of the parameters of 'intergenerational justice' (Hiskes, 2009).

To speak as if the biosphere was in favour of inclusion in political affairs is, of course, only a way of speaking, but it functions as a reminder of the possibility that human labours will be in vain unless the powers of nature are heeded. In the age of monitory democracy, the earliest and most challenging effort to think along these lines was Heidegger's theoretical interpretation of human beings' interference with the biosphere using techniques based on the rationale of total control through measurement and mechanisation (what he termed *Machenschaft*). Heidegger rejected the will to universal measurement and domination; he did so by appealing to the possibility of cultivating an abiding sense of 'dwelling poetically on the earth' (Heidegger, 1972, 1995). Technological hubris, homelessness and their poisonous effects ('world-darkening', 'devastation', 'the flight of the gods') are not necessarily the destiny of the world, he argued. Through a combination of meditative reflection and a new 'openness to mystery' and 'releasement toward beings [*Gelassenheit*]', humans can come to dwell within the biosphere by acting as shepherds who refuse to lord over other beings by preserving them in their nearness to the truth of being - their sense of fruitfully being rooted within a world that must be respected, not dominated.

Researchers can learn much from Heidegger, including recognition of the dangers posed by his vision of 'rootedness' or 'autochthony', or what he termed *Bodenständigkeit*. The vision undoubtedly involved a short-sighted rejection of politics; it proved to be the flipside of his earlier gushing identification with Nazism. That is why the fundamental problem outlined by Heidegger can and must be confronted with cutting-edge research questions that are posed from a democratic perspective. Some possible examples: to what extent is democracy, considered as an historical project, implicated in the trends that Heidegger spotted? Is a way of political thinking guided by the principle of the supremacy of 'the people' incorrigibly arrogant, a way of life inherently at odds with the biosphere and its (supposedly) lesser creatures? How can the current 'greening' of contemporary democracies be explained? Compared with other ways of making decisions, is democracy better equipped to handle the complex, intractable, open-ended and often 'wicked' problems caused by our long-standing quest to dominate nature? Given that democratic mechanisms continue to be heavily encased within territorial state frameworks that are often dysfunctional when it comes to handling environmental problems, can regional and global institutional mechanisms subject to democratic control be developed? What is the best way of understanding the relationship between democracy and the rapid growth of environmental laws in matters ranging from air and water quality to the decontamination of hazardous waste sites, climate change and the protection of biodiversity? Can new democratic forms of representation be extended to nature itself, despite the fact that it has no personality and no voice or 'subjectivity' in any straightforward sense? Is there evidence that monitory democracies are good at stimulating institutional inventions - green political parties, green benches of national courts, bioregional assemblies and other early warning detector systems - that change the meaning and significance of democracy itself?

Cross-Border Democracy?

Among the remarkable features of our age is the spread of power-scrutinising mechanisms whose effects are felt across borders. Some analysts of democracy downplay the significance of these innovations, sometimes on the definitional ground that democracy in representative form functionally requires a territorial state framework (Dahl 1998). Future research needs to interrogate this claim, whose empirical, strategic and normative weaknesses seem obvious. Exactly how, for the first time on any scale in the history of democracy, democracy can be re-imagined across borders is another matter. It is among the cutting-edge tasks of democratic thought and practice. Analysts of ‘global chains’ (Sassen, 2005) and ‘cosmocracy’ (Keane, 2003) as well as advocates of ‘cosmopolitan democracy’ (Archibugi, 2008; Held, 1995, 2006) are generally agreed that there are forces afoot which are combining to complicate and weaken the conventional mechanisms of electoral democracy within states: trends such as the concentration of power in the hands of global firms and the hesitations of parliamentary mechanisms in the face of globalising markets; the disproportionate power of a few states within global bodies such as the United Nations and the G7/G8/G20; and the growth of supranational institutions, agencies and networks which are wholly unaccountable to citizens and their elected representatives.

Much less normative and political agreement follows from the empirical diagnosis of such trends. Some champions of ‘global civil society’ think of it as the best hope for protecting struggles for justice, freedom and solidarity across borders. Others give priority to the reform of the United Nations, for instance by convening a global constitutional convention, or by widening the basis of representation of the General Assembly. Still other democrats work for the general proliferation of power-chastening monitory mechanisms, including cross-border human rights networks, regional parliaments, summits, forums, enhanced public scrutiny of non-governmental organisations and the making and enforcement of laws by local, regional and global courts.

Each of these approaches has advantages and disadvantages that might fruitfully be explored within a new research, teaching and public outreach agenda. For instance, the ‘two-tier’ thinking of cosmopolitan democracy, its call for ‘the creation of new political institutions which would coexist with the system of states but which would override states in clearly defined spheres of activity where those activities have demonstrable transnational and international consequences’ (Held, 2006: 305, 308-9), seems both too simple and too close to conventional accounts of state-bound representative democracy. Cosmopolitan democracy certainly counts as a brave and important effort to find a language through which the lineaments of ‘post-representative’ democracy are defined. But its vision of ‘an intensive, participatory and deliberative democracy’ certainly begs questions about the meaning of democracy (for instance, would democracy in cosmopolitan form require the fiction of a ‘global people’ capable of participating and ‘deliberating’ in global decision-making mechanisms?). The approach also forestalls the hard work of re-imagining the architecture or ‘political geography’ of democracy in new ways – or so a new research agenda might imply. For this purpose, empirical studies of efforts to construct cross-border mechanisms of integration are likely to yield important insights. East Asia is a critical case in point: during the past three decades, bilateral and multilateral cooperation by governments, economic networks and development corridors, and ad hoc problem-solving bodies have combined to bring a greater sense of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ interdependence and, correspondingly, heightened the need for new arguing and bargaining mechanisms, including peer review panels, cross-border parliaments and summits (Gyngell and Wesley, 2003; Pempel, 2005; White, 2006).

War, Peace and Democracy Promotion

The subject of democracy entered the disciplinary field of international relations belatedly, principally during the past several decades. In recent years, in disciplines otherwise as unconnected as diplomatic studies, international relations, peace studies and classics, a large body of literature has been produced on the subject of war, peace and democracy promotion.

Several topics seem especially ripe for further investigation, including a fundamental ethical and political dilemma confronting all democracies: if they intervene in contexts riddled with authoritarianism and violence using military and other means (as India did in Bangladesh in 1971) then democracies are readily accused of double standards, of violating the territorial 'sovereignty' and autonomy of peoples entitled to govern themselves; whereas if they hesitate or avoid intervention in these contexts (as happened initially in Timor Leste during the 1990s) then democracies are easily accused of hypocrisy, of avoiding their responsibility to protect people by sitting back smugly with their arms folded, hence of turning a blind eye to cruelty that contradicts human rights and other democratic standards. Research might show that the dilemma is compounded by the conundrums associated with military intervention in the name of 'democracy promotion'. The building of democracy from scratch in hostile contexts no longer remains an impossibly daunting 'leap in the dark', as Lord Derby famously claimed to Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli in the 1860s. Yet the historical record suggests that successful 'democracy promotion' is always and everywhere subject to the most stringent conditions - preconditions that defy simple-minded presumptions that democratisation is a matter of will, firepower, policy, strategy, toolkits and implementation.

Further research in this area is vital. It is likely to show that democratic self-government requires the creation or preservation of a functioning set of governmental institutions capable of making and executing policies, extracting and distributing revenue, producing laws and public goods, and of course protecting citizens by wielding an effective monopoly over the means of violence. The contradiction between the promise of self-government and the reality of forcible occupation by a power calling itself a democracy also has to be handled sensitively, for instance through a form of 'trusteeship' or 'shared sovereignty' managed by multilateral institutions that help produce a viable, wider regional settlement. Democratisation is not synonymous with state building. Furthermore, occupation has to follow a clear timetable for withdrawal. It has to cultivate wherever possible the institutions of a civil society, including functioning markets, and - as if the list of preconditions is not already long enough - the intruders have to make real efforts to cultivate local trust, not only through respect for local traditions and political aspirations, but especially by enabling the occupied population to organise and speak out against the occupiers, to subject them to mechanisms of public accountability.

Whether occupying powers are capable of democratic self-restraint that leads to successful democracy building is a vital research matter. Historical perspectives are needed, if only to highlight the key point that democratic empires - classical Athens, revolutionary France, the United States of America - have had a mixed record in matters of war, peace and democracy promotion. During the fifth century BCE, there was a strongly symbiotic relationship between Athenian democracy and its war-making prowess (Pritchard, 2010). Revolutionary France witnessed new forms of violence carried out at home and abroad; while America's stated global commitment to 'make the world safe for democracy' (Woodrow Wilson) has been regularly dogged by outright resistance and bitter accusations of double standards and ulterior motives (Smith, 1994). Further research on the American case is likely to heap doubt on the recent presumption that democracies are 'peaceful'; raise tricky

questions about both the war-fighting capacities of democracy and the dangers of hubris and empire; and, minimally, show that most ‘fight them, beat them, teach them to be less autocratic, perhaps even democratic’ wars have been fraught affairs, or outright failures: one prominent report suggests that nearly 85% of a sample of ninety American military interventions from 1898 to 1992 proved democratically infertile, while another study, covering more than 200 United States military operations, including forcible interventions, peacekeeping, border control and military training, showed that democratic effects were observable in only 28% of recorded cases (Keane, 2010; Peceny, 1999; Tures, 2005).

Anti-Democracy Promotion

From a 21st century perspective, the patchy record of success of democracy promotion by military means is complicated by the rise of what might be called *anti-democracy promotion*. During the past several decades, many scholars remarked that democracy had become the dominant global norm, the ‘only game in town’. This claim is beginning to look unrealistic. The first decade of the 21st century has witnessed the rise of new types of criticism and resistance to democracy – paradoxically, often in the name of democracy.

In striking contrast to the recent vigorous debates about democracy promotion, there has been limited scholarly discussion of cleverly justified and organised efforts to concentrate governmental and business power, usually in the name of ‘the people’. It remains to be seen whether contemporary forms of ‘democracy pushback’ (Carothers, 2006) are the prelude to something that resembles a repeat of the widespread failures of democracy during the 1920s and 1930s. It is nevertheless clear, or so research in this area might show, that the critics and foes of democracy are encouraged by various endogenous weaknesses within contemporary democracies. These weaknesses have a distinctively 21st-century feel: they include the decline of the conventional mechanisms of electoral democracy and signs of deep disaffection with parties, parliaments and politicians; regulatory failures in the field of market economies; and the spread across the earth of a ‘triangle’ of means and forms of violence, including the proliferation of nuclear weapons, uncivil wars and new forms of terrorism sustained by asymmetric warfare.

Such processes are potentially threatening to contemporary democracies, which are challenged as well by newly inhospitable international conditions. Worthy of fresh research efforts are two especially striking developments. One trend is the presence of global powers - China and Russia, paragons of authoritarian state capitalism - whose present leaders are clearly not committed to the ideals and institutions of democracy in representative form. Contrary to ‘end of history’ speculations, these powers represent a regime alternative to the representative democracies of Asia and elsewhere. Though many observers continue to be persuaded that there are no normatively acceptable and practically viable alternatives to democratic representation, the truth is that emerging global realities may not care much for viability, or for normative considerations. In any case, new research might show, many commentators are projecting the rise of ‘Asia’ and the decline of the West, especially at the hands of China, itself said to be a distinctive ‘civilization state’ that cares little for democracy and much for economic growth, a new global dominant power that will overtake the United States in economic, cultural and political matters (Mahbubani, 2008; Jacques, 2009).

The wider implication of these trends is clear: with the striking exception of India, consolidated ‘monitory’ democracies are now becoming geographically particular, very much confined within the 30-member OECD world. Further research may indicate that this pattern is being reinforced by a second international trend: the growth of strongly guided, illiberal or defective democratic regimes, for instance in eastern-central Europe, e.g., Ukraine and

Georgia), Asia (Thailand) and in Latin America (Venezuela) (Zakaria, 2003; Merkel, 2004; Keane, 2009). New research might examine the way these regimes seem to tolerate a measure of pluralism and rely on elections, at the same time as they are defined by corrupted political parties, grave deficiencies in the rule of law, press unfreedom and a general spirit of populist authoritarianism. Strange as it may seem, these 'phantom democracies' give the impression that they are responsive to the real or imagined claims of the bulk of the population. The electoral and sometimes demagogic appeals of their presidential governments are in a sense a direct response to certain needs of parts of their population: the government of Vladimir Putin's Russia represents widespread sentiments for a strong state and a 'managed democracy', while the left-wing populist policies of Hugo Chávez are responses to the (self-perceived) interests of the majority of the society for a fair distribution of corporate profits and economic resources. In either case, the political representation of interests is mixed with plebiscitary elements. Intermediary institutions, such as parties, interest groups and parliaments, do not actively represent the will of the people; it is rather the caudillo, the president, the (religious) leader of 'the people' that claims to represent the nation's will. The form of politics unleashed by these regimes - research might show - bears more than a faint resemblance to the type of popular sovereignty proposed by Carl Schmitt (1991 [1923]) in his critique of the emerging representative parliamentary democracies of the early twentieth century. Within these regimes, plebiscitary or populist politics is pseudo-representation: based on claims that the direct and unfiltered will of the people is both honoured and implemented, such politics leads to the weakening and deinstitutionalization of democracy in representative form.

The Making of Peoples

Seen from a 21st century perspective, does the term democracy have a precise meaning? Some sceptics doubt whether it does. They like to quote T.S. Eliot, who famously complained that 'when a term has become so universally sanctified as "democracy" now is, I begin to wonder whether it means anything, in meaning too many things' (Eliot, 1940: 11-12). The commonplace reply to this complaint is that democracy, despite its many forms, is, in essence, a political form that rests upon the principle that 'the people' are the foundation of political authority.

The cliché is a convenient shorthand way of summarising its distinctiveness, a synecdoche that highlights the commonality of its various different parts, but those who speak of democracy in this way arguably fail to acknowledge the changing historical meaning and public salience of the sovereign people principle - or so further research could show. The suggestion can be put like this: Athenian-style assembly democracy supposed straightforwardly that the ultimate source of power and authority is 'the people', a body that is capable of assembling face-to-face in a public place to decide matters concerning the common good. The invention of representative democracy (a term coined during the last quarter of the eighteenth century) had the long-term effect of reconfiguring the sense and function of 'the people'. Representative democracy cast doubt on the presumed homogeneity of 'the people'; it also proposed reasons why flesh-and-blood people were to be kept at arm's length from government - transformed into part-time judges of how well or badly representatives performed. Representative democracy meant: a form of self-government guided by elected representatives of the people.

This reasoning is rejected by contemporary scholars who express nostalgia for the age of assembly democracy by agitating for forms of 'real' or 'deep' or 'participatory' democracy that are designed to bring back the energies and wisdom of an imaginary 'people' (Barber, 1985; Wolin, 2004, 2008). Their nostalgia needs further research, if only because it seems ill

equipped to grasp the ways in which post-electoral or monitory democracy has equally transformative effects on the sense and legitimacy of 'the people'. Monitory democracy arguably exposes the empirical fiction of a unified 'sovereign people'; it demonstrates in action that the world is made up of many *demoi*, and that any particular society is made up of flesh-and-blood people who have different interests and do not necessarily see eye to eye. From a strategic and normative point of view, or so research might show, the dynamic and plural structures of monitory democracy also daily serve as barriers against the uncontrolled worship of 'the people', or what could be dubbed demolatry. Monitory democracy undoubtedly stimulates references to 'the people'; but it does so by treating 'the people' as a vital fictional device in humbling the powerful, by reminding citizens and their representatives that those who make the laws are not the source of their ultimate legitimacy (along these lines, German constitutional lawyers say that 'the people' are a '*Zurechnungssubjekt*', a fictional legal subject to whom collectively binding powers are attributed, but a subject that is not itself capable of acting as a unified and purposeful subject).

New research on the subject of 'the people' might find that the proliferation of monitory mechanisms has the effect of democratising literal accounts of the principle of 'the sovereign people' - publicly exposing and de-naturing it as a haughty watchword that can sometimes prove to be a dangerous fiction. Whether or to what degree the sovereign people principle is being transformed into a handy reference device that most people know to be just a useful political fiction that serves as a reminder that everybody counts in matters of politics, is of course ultimately an empirical question. What is certain is that the 'discovery' or growing awareness that 'the people' is a convenient fiction raises challenging 'anthropological' questions about how exactly a sense of 'peoplehood' is constructed, for instance through contested narratives that define flesh-and-blood people's identities in ethical-cultural terms; promise them enhanced wealth, status and political power; and strengthen their shared sense of worth as a people (Smith, 2003). There are also strategic and normative questions, for instance concerning whether democracies are able to tolerate divergent forms and definitions of 'peoplehood', that is, conflicting understandings of who is or are 'the people'; or even whether democratic ways of handling the exercise of power, in order to avoid bowdlerisation at the hands of populists, may actually require a downgrading of the 'sovereign people' principle, its restriction to particular moments when sharp contests of power require for their resolution the invocation of the fiction of an undivided people that is the source of authority.

Why Democracy?

The current surge of resistance to democracy makes it imperative that research tackles among the toughest sets of questions in the field: is democracy worth defending? Given that the 21st century is already witnessing plenty of other ways of handling power, isn't democracy to be seen as just one - dispensable - ideal among many others? Is it really a universal norm, as many observers have claimed? Or, when all is said and done, is democracy actually just a fake universal norm (as the nineteenth century German anti-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche thought), just one of those pompous little Western values that jostles for people's attention, dazzles them with its promises and - for a time - seduces them into believing that it isn't a mask for power, a tool useful in the struggle by some for mastery over others?

These questions are not easy to answer. New research on the ethics of democracy might note how the stormy history of democracy has been marked by warnings, jeremiads, accusations of its incorrigible weakness and vulnerability to outside forces. Examples

include: Plato's insistence that democracy suffers from mass ignorance and popular seduction of the rich; early modern European republican objections that popular control of large-scale polities is either impossible and/or a recipe for mob rule, followed by tyranny; Tocqueville's anxiety that the modern 'democratic revolution' promotes both the centralisation of state power and new forms of servitude oiled by the selfishness and decayed civic virtues of the property-owning middle class; and Weber's insistence that efficiency and effectiveness functionally require bureaucratic organisations that render impossible the whole idea of democratic equality and freedom.

Research on democracy needs to revisit these negative claims, to learn from them (wherever possible) by making fresh assessments of their conceptual and empirical plausibility and political implications. Urgently needed as well is new research on the long history of positive justifications of democracy. There is plenty of evidence that the catalogue of old reasons once given for the superiority of democracy as a universally desirable mode of self-government is now largely exhausted. Who today plausibly believes that democracy is sanctioned either by the deities or by its military superiority (as many ancient Greeks thought)? Who still straightforwardly thinks of it as a Christian gift to humanity, a worldly expression of the march of History (Mazzini, Sun Yat-sen) or (more recently) a complement of the universal power of communicative reason (Habermas)?

In matters of justificatory reasoning, it turns out that democracy, considered as a possible universal norm, is wilting under the hot sun of suspicion that it is stamped with the birthmark of particularity, that discourses in defence of democracy are always expressions of local time-space contexts (Rorty, 1991; Keane, 2009). That being so, further research might draw the conclusion that since democracy is by no means a 'universal value that people anywhere may have reason to see as valuable' (Sen, 1999) its champions are forced to relativise their enthusiasm by admitting its frail peculiarity and, thus, drawing the conclusion that 'democracy is not for everybody'. There is another, quite different possibility: those political forces seeking to defend the time-space specific form of life called democracy might instead draw the conclusion that it is indeed worth fighting for, especially in a world riddled with friends and foes, and with the demons of power, politics and violence.

Faced with difficult ethical questions and practical challenges of this kind, some scholars have proposed that democracy should part company with the whole business of philosophical justification, conventionally understood as the search for unquestionable First Principles; they draw the conclusion that a truce between philosophy and democracy should be declared, so that democracy sheds its old philosophical baggage and hereon travels light in the world, following the path of pragmatic calculation (Rorty, 1991). Other scholars try instead to speak of democracy as an ethical universal by resorting to justifications based on consequentialist reasoning. They claim, for instance, that democracy promotes peace, or that it is the precondition of market-generated wealth, or the guarantor of human wellness.

New research is likely to show the implausibility of most if not all of these arguments, which thus raises a fundamental question: are there fresh – 21st century - ways of thinking positively about democratic ideals? Can it still be said, with a strong measure of credibility, that democracy is in principle a set of ideals and institutions that can be applied in virtually all settings in the world? Answers to these questions might be prompted partly by research that engages with older normative defences of democracy; and the (not unrelated) insistence that democratic institutions and ways of being are vital conditions of possibility of freedom from the debilitating, often politically dangerous effects of pseudo-universal claims based on belief in such norms as the Nation, the Market and the State. Other candidates for consideration include the claim (famously popularised by Winston Churchill) that the respect for diversity and openness makes democracy the 'least worst' form of government; and the bolder conjecture that democracy is not just the best weapon ever invented for dealing with

human arrogance, folly and hubris, but that it also has a deep sensitivity to the facts of uncertainty, complexity and diversity, and that it therefore has a compelling close affinity with the political problem of identifying, handling and resolving so-called 'wicked problems' (Head, 2008; Fukuyama, 2007). This line of reasoning would certainly be new in the history of democracy: the strongest case for its superiority as a way of preventing and amending mistakes, as a self-reflexive mode of anticipating, defining and handling unexpected events and unforeseen consequences and reversing wrong-headed decisions and their unjust effects.

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