Democracy from within Islam

Louis Cantori *argues that a republican, not a liberal, theory of democracy is best suited to today's Middle East*

It is the tyrannical state that, historically culturally and politically, matters in the Middle East. This is the political reality. Civil society as the centre-piece of liberal democratic theory matters far less. Therefore, if one is to theorize about democratization n the Middle East one must begin with the former and not the latter. The problem is that the theory of democratization is generally dominated by the idea that organizations in civil society harbour individuals that will combine to increase their strength, constrain the state, and reduce the state to the role of 'umpire' over a pluralist society. This liberal theory lacks resonance and congruence with the reality of the politics of Middle Eastern society. If it has any political significance at all, it is at best a later stage in the process of democratic change. The reality is that, in the Middle East, political power is concentrated, not dispersed. It is not only the case that the state expresses this; the state is expected to do this. Therefore, the challenge is to find an alternative theory of democracy that reconciles democracy and the continued existence of the strong state.

Republicanism is such a theory. Republicanism is a political theory of democracy that originated within the Roman Empire (Cicero, Polybius, Livy) and thus chronologically predates the advent of liberalism. It is a theory of democracy without liberalism. Republicanism dates from the ideal of civic virtue of the Roman citizen (the definition of such virtue [*fadila*] appears to be ready made for Islam).

This ideal posits that freedom consists primarily of being free from state domination. The ideal is that the citizen can hold his/her head high and look the officials of the state straight in the eye, self-confidently and with dignity. It is the simplicity and elegance of this formulation that leads one to think of its relevance to the Middle East. This theory says that it is important to begin with first principles; and the first of these is to hold the state at bay and at the same time to preserve it. The Middle Eastern state possesses and will undoubtedly continue to possess two important Islamic responsibilities. The first

'Islamism, the potential driving force of republicanism, embodies the tripartite conservatism of tradition, group responsibility and morality and is thus congruent with the conservatism of republican democracy.'

is to preserve order in society so that it will religiously enjoin that which is good and prohibit that which is evil. The second is to protect the security of the Islamic society against foreign threats. Such a theory is a conservative alternative to liberalism. It is conservative for three reasons. First, it reveres the past – as possessing the traditions and religious values from which the virtue of the citizen is constructed – and not an imagined liberal utopian future. Secondly, it instructs the individual in the responsibilities that he/she has to family and society (and not in the individualism of liberalism). Thirdly, it regards the ends of society as being not individual happiness but, primarily, moral and ethical.

The tyrannical Middle Eastern state, whether of the monarchical or the Arab socialist variety, is a dual state. It is tyrannical in the general sense that its leadership possesses repressive power or, in the case of the Arab socialist regimes, it has usurped power and it claims a certain populism. It is a dual state in that it consists of a 'political state' and a 'social state'. The *political state* consists of ruler, political class and army/security apparatus, and the 'official' economy. This is the 'state' familiar to all who view the political system from the outside. The political state works to the economic benefit of ruler and political class. The security apparatus and the army are able to impose order upon society. An important feature of the political state is that it is able to license groups, by means of the near-universal phenomenon in the Middle East of a law of organizations, according to the principles of corporatism (*takafuliyya*). This corporatism permits the control of such groups via the implicit

understanding of a compact (*mithaq*) of mutual recognition. This gives such groups a degree of autonomy resembling a potential criterion of republicanism, that is, a political space with which to hold the state at a distance. The *social state* (de Tocqueville) consists of the majority of the population. It exists in a semiautonomous relationship to the 'political' state. The population of the social state live in undeveloped poverty. This is also where the informal economy ('black market') is located. This dual state has the potential for political mobilization in the cause of the transformation of the tyrannical state and the advent of republicanism.

The potential driving force of republicanism is Islam or, in its political guise, 'Islamism'. Islamism is the conservative ideology that embodies the tripartite conservatism of tradition, group responsibility and morality (referred to above). The conservatism of Islamism is thus congruent with the conservatism of republican democracy.

The implementation of Islamic republicanism needs to begin with the construction of a modern, Islamic educational curriculum that will teach the responsibilities and virtues of citizenship. In this way, Islamism could, conceivably, dialectically direct the Middle East to its moral and democratic republican future.

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Minorities and Democracy

Anton Pelinka *analyses India's special form of consociational democracy*

India's national identity can best be understood by a close consideration of India's antithesis: Pakistan (created in 1947 when the partition of British India produced India and Pakistan). The idea of Pakistan contradicts the idea of an India that views itself not just as enjoying geographical and cultural, but also political unity. Pakistan contradicts Indian national identity.

In 1932 the British government – in the Round Table discussions – sought a compromise that would meet the demands of the Indian independence movement halfway and still keep India for the British Empire. This was the context in which the concept of Pakistan was invented (in Cambridge) by Muslim students from India.

The name Pakistan is taken from the first initials of the regions of northwest British India: Punjab, Afghan (Northwest) Province, Kashmir, Sindh, and Baluchistan.

The notion of a separate Muslim state that was to develop from the provinces and principalities rather than being part of an independent all-Indian state appealed greatly to two different sets of interests. British colonial policy tried, unsurprisingly, to take advantage of every faultline that contradicted the right of the Congress Party to represent all of India. For that reason, it was the policy of the British to deploy the princes repeatedly against the Congress; and now they could introduce the Muslims as a separate party into the mix as well – or at least those Muslims who had not integrated themselves into the Congress.

The Muslim League, for its part, founded in 1906 as a primarily apolitical representative body of Muslim notables, had developed under the leadership of Mohammed Ali Jinnah into a rival organization of the Congress. The idea of a separate state corresponded to the interest of Jinnah the Muslim politician in emancipating himself from a Congress dominated by the leadership of Gandhi.

Pakistan was an instrument of politics on the part of the British and the Muslim League. But Pakistan was not a coincidence. The subcontinent had been subject to religious conflict long before India became British India, particularly the conflict between Muslims and Hindus, but later also between Muslims and Sikhs. The Indian state that before the unification of India under British rule had come closest to the goal of an all-Indian state, was a state of Muslims – the empire of the great Moguls. With the retreat of European (mostly British) colonialists from the eighteenth century onward, it was from its beginning an empire of Muslim rulers. The majority of Hindus turned against the political hegemony of Islam and there arose a resistance movement against this hegemony that conceived of itself as a religion: that of the Sikhs.
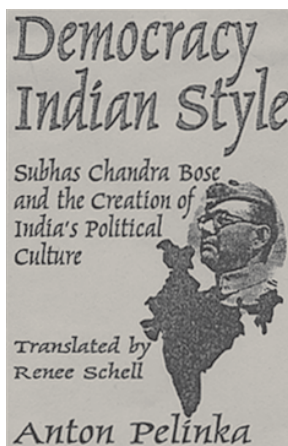
This background helps one to understand, on the one hand, the deep sense of unwillingness on the part of Hindus and Sikhs to live in an Islamic state defined by Muslims; on the other hand, it also helps one to understand the unwillingness of many Muslims who feared an all-Indian state as a sort of revenge on the part of the Hindus for centuries of Islamic dominance.

Against this historical background Jinnah pleaded for the idea of two nations, each characterized by an identity defined in religious and cultural terms. For Jinnah there was no united India. For him there was a Muslim and a Hindu India: Pakistan and Hindustan.

The India of the National Congress, which was the India of Gandhi and Nehru, has, however, never been Hindustan. It is not simply the flip side of Pakistan. It is a nation that does not have the lines of conflict, the 'cleavages' of history and of the present as hallmarks of its national identity. It has not developed along these lines of conflict but, rather, beyond them. India is a nation intended as a bridge across these 'cleavages'.

NATION BUILDING

During the partition of India, the British were mindful of the experience of the division of Ireland in 1922. This experience was one base of the Palestine policy of Attlee's government and of the UN Resolution of 1947 which advocated a partition of the British mandate into an Arab (Palestinian) and a Jewish state.

The partition of Ireland was possible because large segments of both the Catholic and Protestant populations were able to accept such a solution, at least for the interim. The partition of Palestine failed because no one on the Arab side was willing to accept this solution. The partition of India was the goal of the Muslim League and had the (reluctant) support of the Congress. The partition contradicted the concept of a single Indian nation but it was the price for independence that the leadership in the Congress was willing to pay.

The negotiations regarding the end of

> 'The partition of India was the price for independence that the leadership in the Congress was willing to pay.'

Democracy
Indian Style

Subhas Chandra Bose
and the Creation of
India's Political
Culture

Translated by
Renee Schell

Anton Pelinka

British colonial rule were trilateral because India spoke with two voices: that of Jinnah and that of Congress. Congress had, of course, never stopped laying claim to the role of speaker for Indian Muslims. But the elections of 1947 had shown that in the provinces decisive for the relationship between Hindus and Muslims – Bengal, Punjab, and the United Provinces (later Uttar Pradesh) – the majority of Muslim votes went to the League and not to the Congress. Jinnah's claim of speaking for India's Muslims, then, had a credible foundation.

The partition of British India created a homogeneous Pakistan in accordance with the criteria of the Muslim League, which saw religion as a major factor in the founding of the nation. The demographic and geographic circumstances, and the politics of ethnic cleansing and expulsion practised by both India and Pakistan, created a Pakistan that corresponded to Jinnah's notion: a homogeneous state of Muslims. But the partition also produced a religiously heterogeneous India in which as many Muslims lived as in each of the two parts of Pakistan. An India emerged that corresponded to Gandhi's and Nehru's ideas – not a homogeneous state of Hindus, but a state of religious (and linguistic) diversity.

MINORITIES

The consequence of this Indian heterogeneity is that democracy and nation building could not, from the outset, proceed from a homogeneous nation, but rather from a coexistence of minorities. India is a country of minorities (see box). India gains its identity from this state of affairs. The concept of minorities is not understood in an ethnic or linguistic sense. The minorities are the religions outside of Hinduism, as well as the 'scheduled castes' and the 'scheduled tribes'. Ethnic and linguistic groups that are dominant in one of India's states (such as Tamils or Bengals) are not minorities in this sense.

The list of India's minorities seems, at first glance at least, arbitrary and inconsistent. For example, listing Kashmiris, who are primarily Muslims, as a minority means that they are counted twice: once as Muslims and

again as members of an ethnic-linguistic group. But, in the latter capacity, they dominate the states of Jammu and Kashmir and should not actually be judged a minority – if the same criteria apply to them as apply to Tamils and Bengals. Sikhs, on the other hand, appear only as Sikhs and are not counted again as Punjabis.

'The Indian nation is based on democracy; the Pakistani nation exists without there necessarily having to be a democracy.'

The example of Kashmir demonstrates that the concept of a minority in India is particularly ambiguous. It does not so much express an objective demographic

reality as it does a subjective political one: a minority is whoever counts as a minority. The fact that the Muslim Kashmiris are counted twice reflects the political significance of the Kashmir problem, not a unified standard of the concept of minority.

This points up a peculiarity of the concept of minority in India: While in Pakistan the concept has a clear content – a minority is anyone who does not share the hallmark that defines Pakistan, namely, Islam – in India the concept has many layers. Thus, the concept of minority is also contradictory; and alongside the concept of minority the concept of democracy takes on layers of meaning.

CONSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY
Democracy is always associated with the rule of the majority. And yet the simple interpretation that democracy is equivalent to 'majority rule' does not stand up to critical inspection. For democracy also needs respect for the rights of minorities. And, above all, the

INDIA'S MINORITIES

MINORITY	SIZE IN ABSOLUTE NUMBERS	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION
Dalits (scheduled castes)	145,000,000	15.8%
Muslims	104,800,000	11.4%
Adivasis (scheduled tribes) including Nagas	69,000,000 700,000	7.5% 0.1%
Christians	22,080,000	2.4%
Sikhs	13,000,000	1.4%
Kashmiris	8,600,000	0.9%
Buddhists	6,440,000	0.7%

Other minorities listed but not quantified:
Jews, Anglo-Indians, Andaman Islanders
Source: World Directory of Minorities 1997: 554

concept of majority rule leaves open the question of how a majority is formed. In the case of Indian democracy majority rule has two main aspects; these are simultaneously interconnected independent of each other.

1. The majority in the Lok Sabha (parliament) legitimizes the government; and thus, a majority decision by the voters legitimizes – indirectly, in the tradition of Westminster democracy – political rule.

2. The ruling majority is formed by minorities whose interests the rulers consider not only from a tactical perspective but in long-term, systemic terms.

The nature of Indian democracy is characterized not simply by the rule of a 'natural' majority of Hindus. Instead, it is the fact that in India a majority that includes minorities, or that must, in fact, be viewed solely as an alliance of minorities, must be created anew again and again in complex intra- and inter-party agreements. Above all, the reality of the castes destroys the notion of a given Hindu majority. The specificity of the castes makes of the concept 'Hindus' a multitude of partial concepts, such that one could even argue there is no majority in India and that, among the minorities, the Muslims are the largest. Indian democracy is the sharing of power between minorities who thus become a politically defined – and not a 'naturally' given – majority. As such, Indian democracy corresponds to the consensus model of democracy. It is a special form of 'consociational democracy'.

Thus, the political culture of India – independently of the constitution modelled on the Westminster system – is a contribution toward the development of national identity. For, in this way, the minorities are included in majority rule. The Indian nation is therefore not 'Hindustan.' Rather, the Indian nation is a nation of religious, linguistic, and social diversity. And this diversity is expressed not only demographically, but also in the written rules of the political system and in the unwritten rules of the political culture.

Respect for diversity in the political culture of India entails a certain understanding of secularism. In general, Muslims are represented by Muslims, Bengals by Bengals and Dalits by Dalits. Indian democracy is not – as an idealized version of secularism might perhaps imply – blind *vis-à-vis* the real divisions between religions, language groups, and castes. Indian secularism as a crucial prerequisite for democracy and nation building is 'sectorally additive.' That is to say, the individual religious, linguistic, and socially defined subgroups of society represent themselves, but they do not segregate themselves. The answer to Jinnah's 'two nations' has been a single Indian nation. In this nation, subnations enjoy territorial and (or) personal autonomy and are represented by individuals of their own choice on a national level.

A NATION OF CONTRADICTIONS

India – Pakistan's antithesis – is a nation of contradictions, a nation that owes its existence to the rejection of homogeneity. India is a nation because it is a democracy; Pakistan seems to have difficulties with democracy because it is a nation. The Indian nation is the product of a particular Indian variant of democracy; Pakistani democracy is having problems developing itself beyond the given Pakistani nation. The Indian nation is based on democracy; the Pakistani nation exists without there necessarily having to be a democracy.

The Indian nation is the result of contradictions, of the countervailing powers of Indian society. The desire to use these contradictions rather than smoothing them out is the formula behind Indian democracy.

In 1947 the sort of nation India should be was not a given, nor was the notion of what democracy should mean

for India. India approached two tasks pragmatically: the building of a nation that had to allow room for many potential nations, and the creation of a democracy that would be inclusive, not exclusive. Indian democracy embraced different ethnic and linguistic groups, many of which could have been great nations themselves in the European sense. Indian democracy embraced different castes and the 'untouchables', whose oppositions could have paralyzed Indian society. Indian democracy embraced different religions – and invited them to enjoy religious freedom under the label of secularism without deriving a political programme from their religion.

Indian democracy has proven its integrative power many times: in 1947, when it succeeded in building a political system with democratic qualities that included the different separate identities; in 1977 when India (and Indira Gandhi) resisted the temptation of authoritarianism; in 1989 when the end of clear parliamentary majorities did not

'Indian democracy corresponds to the consensus model of democracy.'

lead to the collapse of democracy but to its further development; and in 1988 when the government of the Bharatiya Janata Party did not mean the end of secularism but rather its confirmation.

A politically defined India – an Indian nation – exists because there is Indian democracy.

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Hegemony and Exclusion in the Caribbean

Jonathan Pugh *examines participatory planning in the Caribbeanon*

It's pretty difficult nowadays to get funding from international agencies for a development project in the Caribbean unless it includes some form of participatory planning – planning that directly involves the public. Participatory planning has something for everyone. It attracts donor agencies and Western governments who want to roll back the state so that big business can pursue its own interests. And it is popular with those who want to resist the influence of the West, or with people central concern is equality, human rights, or greater autonomy for Caribbean peoples.

Because of its importance in development programmes, how participatory planning is defined in practice will centrally affect the future of Caribbean democracy. Unfortunately, the growing interest in more participatory forms of planning in the Caribbean does not seem to be producing a significant shift away from the foundations of Caribbean democracy and modernity, based as they are upon oppression, hierarchy and elite domination of the vast majority of the population.

DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE

As in many other regions of the world, participatory planning in the Caribbean shows some signs of being taken over by a narrow democratic discourse. This development is evident in the planning methods being adopted in the region, particularly at the local level, which reflect the Western theory of deliberative democracy.

In modern industrial states, deliberative democracy – as Chantal Mouffe points out – represents a movement away from the notions of 'left' and 'right' toward a morality of 'right' and 'wrong'. Managerialistic and consensus-building techniques are supposed to create a terrain on which

impartial, moral decisions can be reached. In planning practice, what has become known as 'communicative planning' entails bringing together a wide range of pre-constituted interest groups within a given locality; they reach a consensus – or try to; and this is then, usually, presented in the form of a plan or programme of action.

Contributors to *Participatory Planning in the Caribbean: lessons from practice* (Pugh and Potter, 2003), illustrate how the development of this narrow model of participatory planning has influenced both socialist and liberal democratic societies in the region. Even

in Cuba, where the state still dominates decision-making, there have been some initial moves – in the form of programmes in Havana supported by Western agencies – to adopt such an approach. The reasons for this seem pretty clear: cash and legitimacy. Many donor agencies will only fund a country if it adopts more liberal styles of planning. And the increasing unease within the general population of Cuba about the domination of the state requires some *apparent* devolution of decision-making.

HEGEMONY AND EXCLUSION

The hegemonic language of 'development' is often used in order to 'justify' why Caribbean countries should adopt styles of democracy invented in the 'developed' world. As Akhil Gupta so eloquently demonstrates in *Postcolonial Developments* (1998), being signified by the language of 'development' has a fundamental disciplinary influence upon the subject and how others perceive her or him. Doreen Massey has pointed out that when we use terms such as

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'developed' and 'developing', or 'advanced' and 'backward', we are effectively imaging spatial differences (differences between places, regions, countries) as temporal; we are turning differences between places into historical sequences. Difference consists of where a country is placed in a queue. The language of 'modernisation' also plays an important role in maintaining the hegemony of Western liberal conceptions

of democracy across much of the Caribbean. To be 'modern' is to be like the West, to adopt the West's new moral order: unbound capitalism; liberal democracy; and participatory approaches to development. Thus, when the prime minister of Barbados boasts that his country will become the first 'developed' country in the developing world, there is a clear understanding of which styles of politics and planning procedures he should, and which he should not, adopt. In 1997, the Labour Party of St Lucia was re-titled 'New Labour', thereby also firmly demonstrating its commitment to the new Western language of modernisation and its associated political images. Following Lacan, we could say that the signifiers associated with the languages of 'development' and 'modernisation' bring countries' identities into being, in the process shaping how people perceive they should be governed and planned.

The hegemonic languages of development and modernisation do not respect the different values of different cultures, they support one set of beliefs: the culture of the developed world. Thus, negritude and Afrocentrism (which take their influence from a different place, Africa, and a different time, the past) are excluded from the dominant hegemonic languages of development and modernisation. This point can be extended to the language of sustainable development. According to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, central in shaping this particular language, a country that is signified as being 'underdeveloped' and 'not environmentally friendly' should be adopting Western-liberal systems of democracy and planning.

Thus, the Soufriere Marine Management Area (SMMA) in St Lucia was a recipient of the first, prestigious, World Conservation Union/ British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Award in 1997 (presented by Professor David Bellamy), for its ability to implement this model of participatory planning. The SMMA claims to accommodate the needs of both fisherpeople and tourist interests in an all-inclusive consensus. Those that have had the dominant

influence over the SMMA have certainly had an all-inclusive ideal in mind: the development of all-inclusive hotels, not the wider community. Despite being heralded by the international community as a model of sustainable development and participatory planning, the SMMA does not limit the number of

> 'Powerful Western tourist interest groups in the Caribbean tend not to listen to environmentalists or to local fisherpeople wanting to fish in areas where tourists swim.'

divers permitted in Soufrierian waters, nor does it significantly challenge hotel pollution in any way. Powerful Western tourist interest groups in the Caribbean (70 per cent of the tourist dollar spent in the region is returned to the West) tend not to listen to environmentalists, or to local fisherpeople wanting to fish in areas where tourists swim. In response, fishing interests have resorted to physical violence. In the mid-1990s in St Lucia, fisherpeople took the manager of the SMMA to a nearby cliff and threatened to throw him over the edge unless he gave them more respect. In summer 2002, members of the fishing community of Montego Bay, Jamaica, stormed a tourist beach in protest at hotel pollution decreasing their fish stocks. By

September of that year the government had paid this community the equivalent of £400,000 in return for the fisherpeople signing a document which stated that they would not again invade the beach where tourists sunbathe.

But context is important when it comes to the Caribbean. Oppression is much easier to maintain in societies that have been disciplined over a long period of time to respect oppression. Barbados is a case in point, shaped as it has been by a powerful Anglican tradition and a strict, hierarchical race and class system, with fisherpeople firmly placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. At the same time, there are no democratic forms of identification in the form of community organisations that can exert significant political influence. These factors played an important role in shaping the Sustainable Development Plan for Barbados, which, despite being produced through a process of participatory planning involving different government ministries and civil society, and despite some deep underlying concerns about the environmental and social costs of tourism, does not address the impact of the island's most notorious industry. In this case, however, as in as in others in Barbados the concern, even resistance, has not manifested in outright conflict; instead, it has stimulated a growing

apathy toward politics in general.

It is, therefore, important to realise that when we say that an impartial consensus has been reached through the use of certain procedures, what we are often actually saying, following Wittgenstein, is that there is consensus in a 'form of life'. That is, in Barbados for example, consensus building exercises, rather than challenging existing and entrenched hierarchical relations of power, tend to maintain, and indeed legitimise them as a way of life. In Barbados the hegemony of tourism, supported by a hegemonic new moral order of liberal democracy, styles of participatory planning, and unfettered capitalism, has very different consequences when compared to similar cases in Jamaica. In the former there is increased apathy, in the latter increased antagonism.

> 'From the Rastafarian movement to the poetry of Derek Walcott, there are increasing signs that many people from the region want to challenge the dominant hegemonic order.'

BIG TREE, SMALL AXE

Whilst resistance takes many forms in the Caribbean, there is growing discontent – as this discussion illustrates – with the forms Caribbean planning and democracy are taking in practice. From the Rastafarian movement to the writings of George Lamming and the poetry of the Noble Prize-winning Derek Walcott, there are increasing signs that many people from the region want to challenge the dominant hegemonic order. The arts have expressed this underlying spirit of resistance more

strongly than has political science. But a small number of academic fora have also emerged in recent years with the aim of challenging older and deterministic conceptions of society in the Caribbean: those that focus purely on Western interpretations and projections of Caribbean identity. One of these fora, the journal *Small Axe*, has been instrumental in criticising traditional approaches to social, political and cultural studies of the Caribbean region: namely, those which fix political and collective identities. The journal, whose central concern is instead to carve out Caribbean visions of Caribbean identities – it wants to show what the region looks like through the eyes of Caribbean peoples – takes its name from a song by Bob Marley:

> If you are the big tree
> we are the small axe
> ready to cut you down
> well sharp,
> to cut you down

Small Axe frequently publishes the writings of Caribbeanists, including Stuart Hall, Anthony Bogues, Nalini Persram, Walter Rodney, and David Scott. These writers discuss how this rethinking of identity does not require taking identity as a 'given', being

signified as 'underdeveloped', and therefore in need of Western systems of democracy. Rather, it involves seeing how social groupings are signified, and therefore can be re-signified anew. As Stuart Hall has written, the identities of Caribbean peoples are not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed. At the moment, the way in which collective and political identities are being constructed in the Caribbean often results in apathy or antagonism. The all-important ingredient of 'respect' for difference, and for different ways of life, is lacking in Caribbean politics and planning.

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(http://www.planningcaribbean.org.uk)
The website of the Sustainable Development Plan in Barbados is:
http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/countr/barbados/nsd.htm

THE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE VISUAL CULTURE PROJECT

Dr Katie Hill is currently developing a new initiative at CSD, the Contemporary Chinese Visual Culture project. This important resource base will comprise a website, a bibliographic database and an archive of all aspects of visual culture in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia in the Chinese diaspora. The initiative builds on the Chinese Poster Collection at CSD and aims to foster innovative, high quality research through talks, conferences, publications and exhibitions. For further information contact Katie Hill: K.Hill04@wmin.ac.uk.

A Polynesian Republic

John Keane *describes an experiment with democracy – and women's suffrage – on a South Pacific island*

In matters of democracy, a strange rule shapes the historical record. Stated simply, the rule is that democratic innovations, measured in terms both of the meaning of the word and its institutional forms, typically take place not at the centres of social and political life, but at its margins. That 'law' certainly governed one of the most fundamental reforms that affected a majority of the world's population: the extension of voting rights to all women living within a territorially defined political unit. The breakthrough in women's suffrage happened in the oddest of places: in the southern Pacific Ocean, on a remote volcanic island half way between Chile and New Zealand. Named after the young midshipman who was the first European to spot its towering cliffs on 2 July 1767 aboard His Britannic Majesty's *Swallow*, Pitcairn's (later Pitcairn Island) was separated from the human world by a string of archipelagos to the tropical north and the vast southern waters stretching to the ice floes of Antarctica. Carteret had been prevented from landing on the island by rough surf. His report reached Captain James Cook, the Englishman renowned for his role in the scramble by Europeans to make their mark on this part of the world. Cook searched for the little ocean jewel in vain.

The honour of European 'discovery' of the island was left to a dedicated band of mutineers. Something of a French-style revolution against tyranny had broken out on board the armed English ship *HMS Bounty* during the night of 28 April 1789. Accused of "tyrannical conduct, harsh and opprobrious language, ungovernable passion, and a worrying and harassing temper", Lieutenant William Bligh and those loyal to him were thrown off the ship. The revolutionaries headed for Tahiti, to fetch supporters and supplies, then sailed a circuitous route through the warm waters of the mid-Pacific, in search of a new home, at a safe distance from the clutches of the British navy.

Lieutenant Fletcher Christian, his eight mutineers, and seven Tahitian men and twelve Tahitian women broke through the rough surf of sub-tropical Pitcairn on 23 January 1790. Upon the abandoned ruins of a Polynesian settlement – they found stone adzes and gouges, cliff drawings depicting animals and humans, and roughly hewn stone gods guarding sacred sites and burial grounds – the rebels carved out a new life. The experiment had all the elements of the kind of utopian schemes that greatly exercised the imagination and energy of some during the century to come. Countless Victorian sermons were to praise its virtues as well. Guided by the energies of Christian – the son of the

> 'The settlers lived well, and were fruitful. Many children were born, and the population doubled in half a generation.'

coroner of Cumberland and a well-educated man of Manx descent who had been to school with William Wordsworth – the Pitcairners built an English-style village of wooden houses circled around the Edge, a small grassy platform that overlooked the bay where the *Bounty*, stripped of all its contents, had been burned and sunk, to erase all traces of their ancestry. The settlers lived well, and were fruitful. Coconut and banana palms and mulberry and breadfruit trees were plentiful on the island of red soil. The community had brought with them chickens, pigs, sweet potatoes and yams, enough to support themselves and their offspring. Many children were born, and the population doubled in half a generation.

For the European men, it was a pleasurable experiment in the polygamous mixing of races, mainly on their terms. There were subsequent reports of attempts by some Tahitian women to flee the island, of revenge murders by both sexes, even "a conspiracy of the women to kill all the white men when asleep in their beds". Thanks to the self-taught schoolmaster and pastor, a cockney orphan named 'Father' John Adams, Christian morals later prevailed – or so said many parsimonious Victorian parsons, whose sermons praised the use of the single Bible and Book of Common Prayer rescued from *HMS Bounty*. Perhaps indeed the Pitcairners were a Christian community. That would help to explain why, like their counterparts back home in Europe, they attended church on Sundays and said grace before each meal, but also bickered, persecuted each other and picked up guns. A criminal justice system administered by a bench of three elders was introduced – in 1829 – to take care of charges of murder, adultery, theft and wanton destruction or removal of landmarks. Two years later, things had degenerated to the point where the whole community, worried about dwindling resources and expanding numbers, and split by conflicts fuelled by alcohol distilled from the native *ti* plant, opted for relocation back to Tahiti. The roots were found to be rotten. Five months later, tails tucked between their legs, the nomads of the mid-Pacific returned to Pitcairn "after being disgusted with the unchristian Tahitian community."

Contagious diseases and a strange "inflammatory fever" contracted in Tahiti took their toll. Then came the biggest trauma of all: the experience of tyranny. In October 1832, a ship arrived carrying a megalomaniac named Joshua Hill, who claimed he had been sent by the new British government. London was at least twenty weeks away by clipper,

and the islanders were tempted to believe him, and to respect his wishes. Hill promptly appointed himself all-powerful Governor of the Commonwealth of Pitcairn. The consumption and distillation of liquor were banned. A number of "lousy foreigners" were expelled from the island. Labelled a *naysey* (the local *patois* for a bad tempered person), and warned that he should stop putting on airs (*donner-wah-wh-har*), Hill retaliated by turning against everybody. Pie-eyed by the dictatorial powers that he had conferred upon himself, he forbade any contact between the islanders and visiting ships. Hill preached on Sundays with a loaded musket at the pulpit. He built a prison, introduced a treason law, conducted trials without witnesses, and meted out floggings and arbitrary imprisonment for all misdeeds, large and small . . . until the islanders, who discovered from a chance visitor that they had been duped, banished the tyrant from their midst, at gunpoint.

The political woes of the Pitcairners were eased by the unexpected arrival, on 29 November 1838, of the sloop *HMS Fly,* captained by Russell Elliott. Not much is known about Elliott and his political tastes, except that he proved to be a nineteenth-century Kleisthenes with an appetite for democracy. A delegation drawn from the 99 islanders explained to him their fierce desire to preserve their territorial independence against the growing numbers of vessels – sealers, whalers, East India Company merchant vessels, as well as armed ships of the Royal Navy – that now trawled the mid-Pacific seas. The delegation described the islanders' permanent fear of invasion. "There having been cases of recent occurrence",

reported Elliott, "where half the ruffian crew of a whale ship were on shore for a fortnight, during which time, they offered every insult to the inhabitants, and threatened to violate any woman whose protectors they could overcome by force, occasioning the necessary concentration of the men's strength for

Pitcairn Women

the personal protection of the females, and thereby great damage to their crops, which demanded their constant attention; taunting them that they had no laws, no country, no authority that *they* were to respect." The delegation conveyed as well the painful business of past island rivalries, the rapes and murders, and their recent experience of tyranny.

DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTION

The picture presented to Elliott resembled the state of nature famously sketched in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651). It was indeed an island riddled

with power struggles that "leadeth unto death". But Elliott's recommendation stood at right angles to Hobbes's talk of the need for an all-powerful, sovereign Leviathan. Why he recommended a fully democratic constitution is unclear, but that is what he did. On board the *HMS Fly* he drafted and witnessed the signing into law of what would later be impressively titled the *Codex Pitcairnensis*. Dated 30 November 1838, it was an odd document in more ways than one. Constitutionally speaking, it was an acknowledgement by the islanders of their status as a British possession in which they were subjects of the crown – and citizens of a fully self-governing republic! Acting without the authority of London, Elliott sanctioned their use of the Union Jack, to be flown as an ensign of British protection. Pitcairn Island thereby became a British colony, "answerable . . . to Her Majesty's Government".

At the same time, Elliott granted the islanders' wish for a written constitution. The new document – note the contrast with its unwritten counterpart in the motherland – specified the fundamental rules of self-government. Free and fair elections for the post of Magistrate – in effect, the president of the republic of the Pitcairn Islands – were to be held on 1 January of each year. The Magistrate, who had to be native-born and who was required to swear an oath before the assembly of citizens, was to govern through a council consisting of two assistants. One assistant would be appointed by the head of state, the other by a simple majority of the island's voters, who would assemble for the New Year's Day elections in the island's schoolhouse, which would double as their parliamentary assembly. Administering justice with the help of

written-down laws, churchwardens appointed on a monthly basis, and juries of seven citizens, the magistrate (according to section 1 of the constitution) was "not to assume any power or authority on his [sic] own responsibility, or without the consent of the majority of the people." Who then was entitled to vote? Perhaps reflecting their own vulnerability to fatal diseases transmitted by outsiders, or their

> 'elections would be "by the free votes of every native born on the island, male or female . . ."'

ebullient sense of confidence in their offspring, who were compulsorily schooled from the age of six, *Codex Pitcairnensis* specified that the age of political maturity began either at fifteen (for those who were married by law) or eighteen (for those still single). Denizens who had resided on the island for five years would be granted the right of citizenship automatically. These criteria were rather unusual for the times, but the genuine originality of the constitution sprang from the third line of the preamble: it specified, in matter-of-fact prose, that elections for government office would be "by the free votes of every native born on the island, male or female . . ."

REPUBLICAN FEMINISM

The enfranchised women of Pitcairn quickly fixed the gaze of outsiders. "The female descendants of the Otaheite women are almost as muscular as the males, and taller than the generality of the sex", ran one contemporary report. It added, with stars in its eyes, that the new citizens were 'well-looking', that they wore flowers in their ears, and were literate. Feeding upon the fascination – and fantasies – of others, the citizens of Pitcairn understood well how special they were. They proudly explained their novel system of government to the outside world. A letter written by Arthur

Quintal Jr. to the Reverend S.C. Damon, seamen's chaplain at the Sandwich Islands (January 11, 1844), proudly explained the breakthrough:

> The magistrate or chief ruler is chosen yearly by the people. On the 1st of January all the inhabitants that are eligible to vote, (from 18 years old and upward,) give in their votes for a magistrate or counsellor. After the magistrate is chosen, he has the privilege of choosing an assistant if he pleases. It is his duty to hear all grievances, assemble the people together, to state the object of the meeting, hear the complainant and the defendant, and commit the case to a jury of seven persons: whatever the jury decide, he is to see it executed.

At home, they invented rituals to celebrate their achievements. "At twelve o'clock (noon) a number of musketeers assembled under the flagstaff, and fired a volley in honour of the day", reported a visitor to the island exactly sixty years to the day after the arrival of the first European settlers. "After dinner males and females assembled in front of the church (where the British flag was flying), and gave three cheers for Queen Victoria, three for the Government at home, three for the magistrate here, three for absent friends, three for the ladies, and three for the community in general, amid the firing of muskets and ringing of the bell. At sunset the gun of the *Bounty* was again fired, and the day closed in harmony and peace both towards God and man. It is voted that an annual celebration be observed."

Celebrations and self-congratulations aside, the breakthrough on Pitcairn had limitations. No woman candidate for magistrate stepped forward and the constitutional innovation seems not to have produced ripple effects elsewhere. In any event, the experiment in self-rule (or "petticoat government", as detractors like Sir William Denison, Governor General of New South Wales, called it) ended unhappily. In 1896, seemingly because a lenient sentence was given to a

Pitcairn citizen after she threw her illegitimate baby into a well, the British authorities, at the behest of the Governor of New South Wales, ordered direct rule. The first successful experiment in republican feminism died. Yet that did not mean the struggle by women for the vote suddenly stopped breathing . . .

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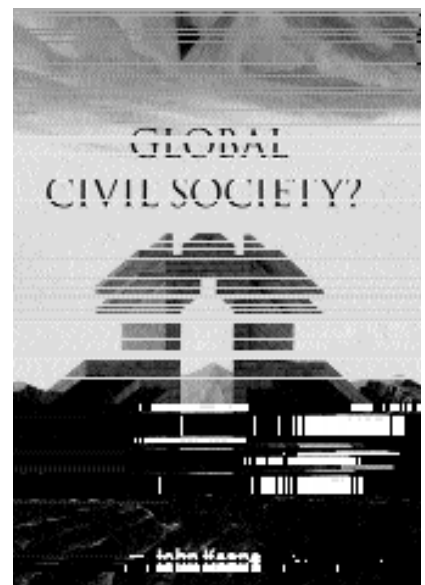
Global Civil Society?
John Keane

(Cambridge University Press, 2003)

John Keane tracks the recent development of a powerful big idea - global civil society. He explores the jumble of contradictory forces currently nurturing or threatening its growth, and he shows how talk of global civil society implies a political vision: of a less violent world founded on legally sanctioned power-sharing arrangements among many different and intermingling forms of socio-economic life.

Cosmopolitan Paradox

David Chandler *takes issue with arguments for cosmopolitan democracy*

In a recent article in *Radical Philosophy* ('What's Left of Cosmopolitanism?', 116, 2002), Bruce Robbins points up the paradox of cosmopolitanism – that it seems "perpetually torn between an empirical dimension and a normative dimension". For Robbins, the paradox of cosmopolitanism is rooted in the limited empirical sense of political community. For genuine democracy people need to belong to the same "community of fate" and there is, at present, little evidence of such a sense of cosmopolitan consciousness.

Robbins suggests that it would be wrong to use the empirical limits to cosmopolitan practices as an argument against normative cosmopolitan claims. On the contrary, the empirical reality that "there is as yet little evidence of transnational solidarity" should be the

> 'Advocates of cosmopolitan democracy downgrade the importance of the rights framework of democracy and political equality.'

justification for engagement on the side of the progressive cosmopolitan cause. This campaigning perspective is advocated by several cosmopolitan theorists, for example, Daniele Archibugi, David Held, Mary Kaldor, and Ken Booth, who, in different ways, seek to develop ideas and mechanisms whereby global civil society can encourage cosmopolitan practices against the 'communitarian' inclinations of national governments and their electorates.

This article suggests that the 'cosmopolitan paradox' – the gap between universal aspiration and hierarchical practice – is not, however, merely one of

cosmopolitan 'consciousness' lagging behind an immanent cosmopolitan 'reality'. Rather, the paradox is rooted in the essence of the cosmopolitan thesis itself. The limitations of abstract normative cosmopolitan conceptions of 'rights' and 'responsibilities', in a world structured by economic and social inequalities, raise major questions over the progressive claims made by cosmopolitan theorists. In fact, rather than challenging existing international structures of power, there is a real danger that the cosmopolitan impulse can legitimise a much more hierarchical set of international relationships.

COSMOPOLITAN ETHICS

Far from being a utopian theory of hope in progress and the development of democracy, cosmopolitan theory appears to reflect a growing disillusionment with politics at the international level. Cosmopolitan theorists are disappointed that, after the end of the Cold War, the resources of international society have not been devoted towards resolving outstanding 'global concerns'. It appears that the only thing stopping progress today, after the 'diversion' of the Cold War, is the narrow preoccupation of nation states with appeasing their electorates as opposed to addressing global concerns.

This disillusionment with the narrow or selfish interests of *realpolitik*, and its legitimisation through democratic mandates, has resulted in a growing attention to the prioritisation of ethical or moral approaches. Ken Booth, for example, has asserted that the narrow focus on the political sphere of state interests and inter-state rivalry in international relations theory has become a barrier to developing new approaches which can address the problems of the international arena: "What is needed must have *morality* at its centre because the fundamental

questions of how we might and can live together concern values, not instrumental rationality."

These self-acknowledged utopian aspects of cosmopolitan theory stem from the fact that there is more attention to the ethical ends of cosmopolitan democracy than there is to the means for ensuring these ends. The irony is that, despite the talk about extending and deepening democracy, cosmopolitan theory is not really concerned with establishing new frameworks for democracy on the international level. Rather, cosmopolitans seek to legitimise moral and ethical policy ends against the apparently 'narrow limits' of liberal democratic frameworks and of sovereign government. The cosmopolitans and global governance advocates challenge the existing order because they believe that progressive ends – such as the protection of human rights, international peace or sustainable development – would be more easily achieved without the institutional constraints of democratic accountability or the formalised rights of state sovereignty.

In fact, the moral and ethical premises of cosmopolitan democracy necessarily lead advocates of this perspective to downgrade the importance of the rights framework of democracy and political equality. For cosmopolitans, the artificial construction of the global citizen-subject is the key concept in their attempt to privilege the sphere of morality and ethics over that of politics. The cosmopolitan, or non-national, democratic subject is defined through being freed from any political framework

which institutionalises liberal democratic norms of formal accountability. The cosmopolitan citizen, by definition, has no fixed territorial identity and thereby no place within any institutionalised framework of legal and political equality from which to hold policy actors to formal account. Freed from any such framework, the 'rights' of the cosmopolitan citizen become dependent on the advocacy of an external agency. By default, the cosmopolitan subject becomes concrete only through 'representation' on a particular issue through the agency of civil society institutions which also have an existence free from the institutionalised political framework of the nation-state.

Without the institutionalisation of mechanisms of accountability civil society claims to 'represent the people' remain unsubstantiated. Whereas the claim for representation is inevitably contested, civil society institutions and movements often assert that the crucial role which they perform is that of 'articulation' of the needs of global citizens. Because the global citizen cannot directly hold policy-makers to account, the role of civil society interlocutors becomes central to give content to claims of democracy without formal representation. Mary Kaldor argues that "the role of NGOs is not to be representative but to raise awareness", adding that the "appeal is to moral conscience" not to political majorities.

Cosmopolitan theorists start from a radical critique of existing norms in international relations, but it is a critique based on moral advocacy. The cosmopolitan impulse is to forward moral principles in the form of the 'rights' claims of cosmopolitan citizens. This inversion of the relationship between rights and their subjects poses potential dangers in legitimising new, more hierarchical relations of domination in the international sphere.

COSMOPOLITAN PRACTICE

The universal human subject of cosmopolitan rights may be identifiable as an individual, but unless that individual can act within a political or legal framework she/he will be unable to exercise equal legal or political rights. In reinterpreting rights as a moral category, as opposed to a legal and political one, a contradiction appears between the enforcement and guarantee of cosmopolitan rights and the formal equality of the liberal democratic legal and political framework. Within the ethical normative framework of cosmopolitan theory, new and increasingly ad hoc frameworks of decision-making are seen to be positive; at the same time, vital areas of formal accountability, at both the domestic and international level, are questioned.

Firstly, *the formal right of sovereign equality under international law*. The UN Charter regime was a radical break from the pre-World War Two system of legitimate Great Power domination. For

'In the cosmopolitan framework a decision by popular vote could be as flawed as national governments having the final say.'

the first time non-Western states had the same legitimacy and international rights as the more developed Western states, despite the inequality of economic and military power. Unlike the UN, which formally recognises the equality of nation-states regardless of political regime, cosmopolitans argue that many regimes are illegitimate. The right to equality under international law, the central pillar of the post-colonial international system, would be conditional or residual under the cosmopolitan framework. As Held notes, "sovereignty *per se* is no longer a straightforward guarantee of international legitimacy". States that fail

the assessments of their legitimacy will no longer have equal standing or full sovereign rights and could be legitimately acted against in the international arena.

Secondly, *the right of sovereign autonomy or self-government*. Cosmopolitans assert that despite adherence to all internationally accepted formal democratic procedures, a state's government may not be truly democratic. For Archibugi, the "governments of states do not necessarily represent global interests. On the contrary, they tend to privilege the particular interests of their own political quarter". Because of this 'bias' of self-interest a decision or choice made by the *demos*, or the people, even with full information and full freedom of decision-making, would not necessarily have political legitimacy. In the cosmopolitan framework a decision by popular vote could be as flawed as national governments having the final say.

For cosmopolitan theorists the ethical ends which they advocate are privileged above the sphere of democracy. In this framework a small minority may be more 'democratic' than a large majority, if they have an outlook attuned to cosmopolitan aspirations. Mary Kaldor draws out the implications of the argument when she suggests that the international community should not necessarily consult elected local representatives but seek 'to identify local advocates of cosmopolitanism' where there are 'islands of civility'. Just as states can not be equally trusted with cosmopolitan rights, neither can people. Instead of the 'limited' but fixed *demos* of the nation state there is a highly selective '*demos*' identified by international institutions guided by the cosmopolitan impulse.

COSMOPOLITAN GOVERNANCE?

If governments and people cannot be trusted to overcome their narrow 'political' differences and prejudices, then a new authority – 'independent' of established political mechanisms of

Cosmopolitan citizenship remains only an inherent possibility without a globally institutionalised framework of political and legal equality.

democratic accountability – is needed to enforce cosmopolitan morality. Cosmopolitan theorists favour an independent and 'higher' mechanism of international regulation in the belief that under such a system the ethical ends of cosmopolitan liberalism can be enforced. The authority they wish to establish, without democratic accountability but with the legitimacy to overrule popular opinion and elected governments, is that of cosmopolitan governance. The essential attribute of 'governance' is that it is regulation freed from the formal restrictions of 'government'. Cosmopolitan governance, the less accountable power of international regulation, is the ideological counterpart to the cosmopolitan citizen, who has fewer rights of democratic accountability. In exchange for new 'rights' for the global individual, the cosmopolitans want to sacrifice the old rights of self-government, which are seen to restrict the benign and protective actions of international institutions.

These rights, David Held argues, would exist under a new body of "cosmopolitan democratic law", a "domain of law different in kind from the law of states and the law made between one state and another, that is, international law". This law "transcends the particular claims of nations and states" and would be upheld by a framework of "interlocking jurisdictions". While there is no world state that is constituted politically, there are international and transnational institutions which have the authority to undermine sovereignty when the need arises regarding an issue of "global concern".

This prescription of a new form of flexible law-making, no longer formally restricted by traditional domestic or international frameworks of accountability, reflects the evolving practice of leading Western states in international intervention. Over recent years the legitimisation of intervention through claims of protecting the universal rights of citizens has clashed with traditional international law restrictions on interference in the internal affairs of sovereign nation-states. The report of the Independent

International Commission on Kosovo acknowledged the gap between international law and the practice of leading Western states and suggested "the need to close the gap between legality and legitimacy". However, rather than proposing to extend the formal reach of international law, the Commission sought to justify a new moral conception of "legitimacy", one which differed from formal legality. They described their doctrinal proposal for humanitarian intervention as "situated in a gray zone of ambiguity between an extension of international law and a proposal for an international moral consensus", concluding that "this gray zone goes beyond strict ideas of legality to incorporate more flexible views of legitimacy".

The attempt to resolve the clash between the partial demands of Western powers and the universal form of law means that the advocates of cosmopolitan forms of international law assert the need for new, more flexible, legal forms. Whether a military intervention is 'legitimate' is in the last analysis, as John Holbrook has pointed out, a question of "the perspectives and interests" of those involved. This viewpoint, implicitly adopted by the Commission, is an open argument for law-making by an elite group of Western powers sitting in judgement over their own actions.

The cosmopolitans allege that this 'ethical' framework can lead to a more equal society, as any state can be intervened in if it breaches moral or ethical norms. However, larger and more powerful states will have the resources and opportunities to intervene whereas weaker states will be unable to take on the interventionist duties on behalf of the 'global citizen'. This flexible and multi-layered framework, where the strict hierarchies of international law are

absent, and there are no established frameworks of accountability in decision-making, undermines the UN Charter protections for non-Western states. The realities of unequal power relations mean that the more flexible decision-making is, and the less fixed international law, the easier it is for more powerful states to dictate the international agenda.

The ethical or normative approach of cosmopolitanism legitimates the undermining of the formal legal and political framework of international society, but does little to shape a new or more positive framework of rights in the international sphere. In fact, the focus on ethical and moral responsibility helps cohere a new hierarchy of power where major Western states claim an ethical mantle of 'responsibility' to act in the interests of the less fortunate around the world.

Today the governments of the United States and Britain declare they have a 'duty' to develop democracy and protect the cosmopolitan rights of people the world over, if necessary through intervening by military, diplomatic or economic means. There are political parallels with a previous 'imperial' era of Great Power regulation in that the actions of the world's most powerful states are neither accountable to the broader world community of states as embodied in the United Nations nor to the citizens of the states in which they choose to intervene.

Cosmopolitan citizenship, while a positive aspiration, remains only an inherent possibility without a globally institutionalised framework of political and legal equality. Attempts to posit cosmopolitan goals in the absence of such a framework paradoxically result in a more divisive and exclusionary system of international regulation. In such a system, the rights of self-government, democracy and autonomy become the privilege of major world powers while the majority of states face a return to the era of open Great Power interference in their social, economic and political affairs.

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The Consensus Conference Network

In recent years 'consensus conferences' – in which citizens, interest groups, scientists, technical experts and decision-makers help shape public policy-making on science and technology – have become increasingly popular. (See 'The People's Voice' by Simon Joss in CSD Bulletin *Vol. 10/1 [Winter 2002-3]).*

Alison Mohr *describes some key features of the first Australian consensus conference, held in 1999, and considers how 'actor-network theory' can help us understand the way consensus conferences work.*

In March 1999, 14 'ordinary' Australians, seated on the red leather benches of Old Parliament House in Canberra, "talked, argued, discussed and, more importantly, listened to and respected the views" of the expert witnesses seated opposite them. The occasion was the first Australian consensus conference; the highly controversial topic, gene technology in the food chain. The Australian Consumers' Association (ACA) had initiated the conference in order to encourage public participation in an issue of major social concern. The ACA, the only citizen-based organisation that sponsored the conference, had sought seed funding from the Myer Foundation in early 1998; further sponsorship was received from a variety of governmental, scientific, and research and development corporations. The conference itself was organised under the auspices of the Australian Museum (though the Museum itself had no particular interest in the field of gene technology). The Museum's planning document outlined the perceived need for the consensus conference:

> it is based on the concept that informed public debate is crucial to the ongoing development of a healthy society; that such debate can only take place when inequalities between experts and non-experts are minimalised; and that nowhere is

that debate more important than in the so rapidly advancing fields of science and technology. This is because of their power to alter everybody's life, and because it is so often in these fields that the importance of a pluralistic range of views is denied, and scientific and

'The Australian consensus conference was designed to produce a consensual document; to contribute to government policy-making; and to raise the level of consciousness/debate about genetically modified foods.'

commercial perspectives are well established.

The chairperson of the conference steering committee, Sir Laurence Street (a former Chief Justice of New South Wales), expressed confidence that the conference was likely to "achieve greater understanding between government, industry, science and the community about gene technology in the food chain". By advocating a 'precautionary approach' the interests of the population as a whole rather than the narrower concerns of the commercial and scientific communities would be represented in the technological decision-making processes surrounding gene technology in the food chain.

Like its Danish counterparts, the Australian consensus conference was designed to produce a consensual

document; to contribute to government policy-making; and to raise the level of consciousness/debate about genetically modified foods. This layering of differently-focused aims is reflected in the broad audience targeted by the conference's consensual document. On one hand, it aims to inform parliamentarians, scientists, interest and consumer groups and policy-makers in order to make a specific input to policy; on the other, it aims to inform media representatives and the general public in order to facilitate broad public debate.

AN ACTOR-NETWORK APPROACH

Actor-network theory – pioneered in the early 1980s by the French sociologists Michel Callon and Bruno Latour – aims to (re)construct the complexities of techno-scientific knowledge and to examine how certain techno-scientific practices become indispensable – or, conversely, why they fail – in the socio-technical networks within which they circulate.

The theory's emphasis on the wide range of the participants involved in decision-making processes such as consensus conference networks makes it ideal as a methodological framework for analysing the myriad heterogeneous elements involved in consensus conferences.

Actor-network theory highlights the factors that produce stability or instability within a decision-making network: these factors include texts,

A DISTINCTIVE NETWORK

The first Australian consensus conference network had three distinctive features: it operated under severe time constraints; it was self-evaluative; and it had a personal base.

Time. A consensus conference network is a dynamic, temporary alliance for which groups of actors, each of whom is capable of making a valuable contribution to a short-term project, are recruited, mobilised and disbanded within a 12-18-month period. These actors, who sit on linked panels (lay, expert, steering committee) as well as in the audience, include not just traditional 'stakeholders' – experts, analysts and industry – but citizens and consumers, as well. The latter may influence expert views and affect technology policy-making; their interaction will always result in social learning for both participants and the audience. An actor-network analysis of a consensus conference highlights how non-experts in the policy-making process acquire agency and power.

Created to achieve a specific objective – and operating within rigorous constraints imposed by time, money and performance – such networks cease to exist after the objective is attained or abandoned. It is therefore important for network actors rapidly to develop a committed, interactive, and participative alliance in order to facilitate a seamless flow of knowledge.

The Australian conference was particularly constrained by lack of time. The steering committee's preliminary timetable was reduced by two months in order to meet the timeframe for possible input into government gene-technology policy processes. As a result, some of the steering committee members wrote the briefing paper, rather than – as is generally the case – journalists. Initial negotiations between the steering committee and the Australian Museum (under whose auspices the conference was organised) about the Museum's communications responsibilities failed – also partly due to lack of time. Time constraints also forced the cancellation of the 'hearing of interested parties'; this resulted in the marginalisation of a range of social, political and technical actors from the conference network. Limited time to formulate the key questions, central to the role of the lay panel, meant that the panel had to entrust the facilitator and the professional writer (hired to help the lay panel formulate its questions and conclusions) with the final wording of the questions. Furthermore, lack of time and information meant that the lay panel had to delegate the selection of suitable expert speakers to the facilitator and steering committee. Formal interactions between network actors were also hindered by time constraints, particularly during cross-questioning sessions; as a result, a significant number of audience members were marginalised. Finally, and most notably, time constraints on the lay panel's negotiations during the report-writing process forced panel actors to reach 'agreement by attrition'.

The Australian consensus conference incorporated an element of *self-evaluation*. This institutional reflexivity is a common characteristic of consensus conference model as most organisers are keen to assess the quality of the organisational processes. This institutional reflexivity enables continuing revision of network practices and, thus, a possible reordering of relations amongst network actors.

Personal base. Unlike its Danish and, to a lesser extent, its Dutch counterparts, the Australian consensus conference network had no permanent institutional base. Consequently, because it lacked a direct, established connection to political power, it was forced to create its own power base; this base was personal rather than institutional. The conference network organisers appointed powerful (or seemingly powerful) people as the spokespersons for the emergent network so that they could enrol the necessary actors into the network. Enrolment was heavily influenced by the respect held for the chairperson and by the fact that the Australian Consumer Association was involved. A lay panel member admitted to agreeing to participate in the consensus conference "because of Sir Laurence [Street]'s involvement", as did an expert speaker, who thought, "Sir Laurence lent a certain sense of gravity to the situation".

money, and personnel. It is particularly concerned with how power is mobilised and alliances constructed. The theory's focus on the heterogeneous nature of such alliances means, for example, that it highlights the social, political, and economic as much as the scientific and technological aspects of what scientists and technologists do. Success in decision-making, actor-network theory contends, lies in constructing complex networks that incorporate non-expert social actors; in this way all the necessary elements are assembled to ensure that experiments work, their results are communicated to the relevant policy-makers, and that the policy-makers can implement them.

STABILISING THE NETWORK
The consensus conference sequence – in terms of actor-network theory – can be thought of as the construction of a network to achieve at least one immediate goal: namely, a single potential policy input, the consensus position described in the lay panel's report. In order to achieve this goal, the network needs to be recruited, stabilised and made to produce its consensus statement. But how is it that a range of disparate actors, lay and expert, are mobilised to achieve that particular goal? How are such diverse policy networks stabilised until they finish their work? While some actor-networks embody fluid and informal 'spaces of negotiation', others, like the consensus conference policy network, are more regulated 'spaces of prescription' bound by formal protocols, conventions and established procedures. Yet these procedures are open to negotiation and interpretation by a network of actors who seek to reconfigure material resources on their own terms. The product of the consensus conference network, its consensus statement, is therefore an amalgam of individual and heterogeneous interests.

In addition, three key factors helped stabilise the network: texts, money, and people.

Texts. Juxtaposed with the right mix of actors and entities, texts create a stable network; they are the location in which the network is realised. As such, they exert power. The consensus conference produces texts from the preparation stages through to the event's conclusion (the presentation of the lay panel's consensus statement). Earlier documents help to determine what gets into, and what is excluded from, later texts. Texts also help to determine who gains access to, and who is excluded from, the consensus conference process.

The organisers of the Australian consensus conference used texts to 'stabilise' the Australian consensus conference network. They encompassed procedures (protocols adopted from the Danish consensus conferences, Australian guidelines), planning (preliminary agendas, steering committee minutes, journalists' brief, communications strategy), preparation (briefing paper, newspaper articles, list of possible expert speakers), recruitment (advertisements, recruitment methodology, contracts, memorandums of understanding), and evaluation (evaluation terms of reference, evaluation reports of phases 1 and 2 of the conference, responses to the lay panel's report, media reports). Just as important were the opening and keynote speeches, experts' presentations and the Senate President's acceptance speech.

Money. Money also plays an important role in shaping the consensus conference process. Most consensus conferences depend on a number of funding sources, with only limited amounts coming from government. Apart from those held in Denmark and the Netherlands, a growing number have been organised by non-governmental bodies – such as universities and consumer organisations – that traditionally lack sufficient resources to be the sole provider of funds. Depending on the institutional arrangements of the conference, organisers may need to source additional funds from sponsors. Sponsors may demand a certain level of control over the process. It is imperative to track where funds have come from, how they were distributed and how they affect the relationship between the (neutral) organiser and (mostly stakeholder) sponsors. The source of funds may have an influence upon a conference's perceived neutrality or partiality.

Moreover, monetary rewards for participation are a powerful agent of recruitment of network personnel, both expert and lay. To enrol participants in the Australian conference, per diems covering travel, accommodation and food were offered by the organisers as a

> ' Texts help to determine who gains access to, and who is excluded from, the consensus conference process.

symbolic payment for time donated. Money is also needed to promote crucial media support. A lack of sufficient funds may result in there being few media opportunities; this places significant limitations on the network's communication of its final product.

People. The choice of particular people affects the operation of the consensus conference. They can have a stabilising or disruptive effect on the consensus conference network, depending on whether they have particular skills (facilitator, professional writer, publicist), or expertise (expert speakers) – or lack thereof (lay panellists) – a reputation (chairperson), or in their capacity as representatives of organisations (steering committee members, conference coordinator). The steering committee has a core organisational role; the chairperson and facilitator play a key coordinating role, moderating the interactions between the lay panel, expert speakers and the audience; and the conference coordinator and professional writer play utilitarian roles, providing practical support to the lay panel during the report writing process. These network actors are required to balance their professional duties with the maintenance of critical distance, thus avoiding any influence over the process and its outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Actor-network theory's vocabulary is ideally placed to incorporate those actors who are presently excluded from technological decision-making processes and are faced with the products of new technologies. The theory enables the representation of these 'others'. Actor-network theory's unique approach to the study of power within networks allows – other things being equal – the observer to follow the production of inequalities within a network.

Alison Mohr is a Research Fellow at CSD. This is an edited extract from her PhD Thesis, 'A New Policy-Making Initiative? The First Australian Consensus Conference.' (Griffith Univesity, 2003.)

The Consensus Conference Lay Panel

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CHANTAL MOUFFE

politics and passions
the stakes of democracy

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Requests for further details and offers of financial support should be directed to:
Dr Richard Whitman, Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster, 100 Park Village East, London NW1 3SR.

Staff News

DAVID CHANDLER
Dr Chandler's forthcoming articles include 'New Rights for Old? Cosmopolitan Citizenship and the Critique of State Sovereignty', *Political Studies*, June 2003; and 'Rhetoric without Responsibility: The Attraction of Ethical Foreign Policy', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, October 2003.

ABDELWAHAB EL-AFFENDI
has contributed a chapter, 'Democracy and the Islamist Paradox', to *Understanding Democratic Politics*, ed. Roland Axtmann, (Sage, 2003). *The Project on Democracy in the Muslim World*, which he co-ordinates, has received a grant of £24,000 from the State of Qatar.

HARRIET EVANS
Dr Evans's recent publications include 'Dangerous Sexualities in China', in *Sexualities*, ed. Jeffrey Weeks *et al* (Routledge, 2003); her forthcoming papers include 'Gendered Memories of the Chinese Revolution' (Chinese Femininities conference, Fudan University, Shanghai, June 2003).

JOHN OWENS
has been awarded a British Academy grant for the period 2003-05 to investigate the 'Impact of Personal Characteristics on Leadership in the Contemporary United States House of Representatives'.

CHANTAL MOUFFE
will give the keynote address at the 10th Biennial Conference of the International Society of Theoretical Psychology in Istanbul in June.

RICHARD WHITMAN
gave the keynote address - 'Enlarged EU and European Security' - at the conference, 'The Convention on the Future of Europe', sponsored by UACES, Leeds City Council and the European Parliament, Leeds Civic Hall, 25 April 2003.

For information about other staff members' work see pages 8 and 11.

CSD

The Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD) is the postgraduate and post-doctoral research centre of Politics and International Relations at the University of Westminster.

Well known for its inter-disciplinary work, CSD is led by a team of internationally recognized scholars whose teaching and research concentrate on the interplay of states, cultures and civil societies. CSD also supports research into all aspects of the past, present and future of democracy, in such diverse areas as political theory and philosophy, international relations and law, European Union social policy, gender and politics, mass media and communications, and the politics and culture of China, Europe, the United States, and Muslim societies.

CSD is located in the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Lnaguages (SSHL) on the Regent Campus, and works alongside the influential Policy Studies Institute. It hosts seminars, public lectures and symposia in its efforts to foster greater awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of democracy in the public and private spheres at local, regional, national, and international levels. It offers a number of MAs on a one-year full-time, two-year part-time, basis (see back page for details). CSD's publications include a series of working papers entitled *CSD Perspectives* and this bulletin.

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