

## **Globalisation & Democracy: Spreading but Thinning?**

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### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 I here attempt to discuss aspects of a rather large topic: the manner in which globalisation (as we might understand that process) has resulted, if indeed it has, in the spread of democracy and the promotion of democracy as a form of government and as a wider ideal. In doing so I make a great number of sweeping generalisations, but this is a Conference Paper only.
- 1.2 The point of argument is that if globalisation spreads democracy, the *quantity* of democracy – we are all conscious of ways in which its remote influences undermine real local choices – it is important to be aware of what *quality* of democracy, what brand, is being accepted as the hallmark.
- 1.3 In relation to Africa in particular I discuss the perception that the pace of global cross-boundary influence and change in the 1990s brought with it a new wave of democratisation of the continent. I discuss the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)<sup>2</sup> and reflect on the increasing use of the term 'governance', and the implication of this, contrasting it with 'government' and with 'democracy', a term that it is of course also necessary to unpack.
- 1.4 I see all this as fitting within the theme of the Conference generally: but by doing so I hope that I do not reinforce the sense that there is little to speak about in relationship to Africa-and-Australasia (so that one must resort to global generalisations).<sup>3</sup>
- 1.5 In May the world celebrated Timor-Leste's independence as a modern democratic nation state, and work began in earnest on the reconstruction of the country's political and economic life. Significantly for this paper, its UN-supervised transition to statehood is accorded international legitimacy at least in part because of the democratic electoral processes, including the separation referendum and presidency ballots, underpinning the new dispensation.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.nepad.org](http://www.nepad.org)

<sup>3</sup> I should add at the outset that the thrust of many of my comments flow from a reading of a number of writers in the area, particularly Susan Marks (an Australian international lawyer at the University of Cambridge, under whom I was recently fortunate to study). In part this no doubt reflects the under-developed state of my own ideas on these issues as someone in my first year of full-time academia; in part it is because I am content to be presenting others' ideas, perhaps with my own comment, especially where these ideas are still themselves so valid, and perhaps have not received the air-play they deserve. I see it as an academic's function not only to contribute him or herself by original means, but also to draw attention in public and in a digestible way to the merit-worthy works of others.

## 2. A comment on 'Globalisation'

- 2.1 I must pause here to comment on what I might mean by 'globalisation', which is of course the theme of the Conference.
- 2.2 I mean it to describe the process by which economies and markets (but also peoples, cultures and ideas and ideologies) have become increasingly integrated and interdependent, mobile and unpredictable, at the same time as much economic activity is transnational, and where what is lagging behind is the ability of states to regulate individually or collectively the movement of, in particular, capital. The pace and scale of this is unprecedented, etc. It is spoken of as a compression of time and space.<sup>4</sup> To my mind a vivid and succinct description of the phenomenon as we all understand it is one that reflects on distant influence.<sup>5</sup> This encapsulates the notion of vulnerability at a local level to decisions made in another context and physical location, and to trends and events that have influence well beyond their originating point.
- 2.3 It is clear how democracy may thereby be undermined. Power, and particularly economic power, is diverted from the nation state and dispersed in less visible, tangible and accountable forms, and there is no corresponding transfer of power to citizens on this global scale, except to the extent that one sees the development of transnational representative and accountable regulatory bodies, or a 'cosmopolitan citizenship' in the manner argued by David Held (see below). That is, in the context of the relationship between democracy and globalisation, the phenomenon has not resulted in the globalisation of public political control and decision-making at a transnational level to mirror economic globalisation. Decision-making has instead become somewhat privatised and so perhaps less transparent at this most influential and elusive level.<sup>6</sup> In this sense it is said that there is 'a democratic deficit' at the global decision-making level.
- 2.4 Writings on aspects of the globalisation phenomenon are so numerous and diverse that it is almost impossible to categorise them. For some, it is simply a code word for multinational corporate imperialism with the consequent exploitation of labour and resources and entrenchment of material inequality. For others, it is the beginning of a golden age, in particular one in which information-sharing increases informed participation in events.
- 2.5 For my purposes, it is convenient to adopt the simplistic analysis that looks at globalisation as one now understands cholesterol: 'good globalisation' and 'bad globalisation.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Erik Oddvar Eriksen, 'Globalisation and Democracy' *Arena Working Papers* WP99/23 ([www.arena.uio.no](http://www.arena.uio.no))

<sup>5</sup> Sunil Amrith, 'Democracy, Globalisation and Health: The African Dilemma', paper to the Common Security Forum, King's College London, Centre for History and Economics, July 2001.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf for example Canadian Action Party, policy statement, 'Globalization and the Death of Democracy'; [www.canadianactionparty.ca](http://www.canadianactionparty.ca)

- 2.6 The former might be described as those manifestations that increase cross-cultural awareness, foster cooperation on common issues such as environmental ones, allow opportunities for trade and shared expertise, etc. It is clear that democracy has certainly spread with the globalisation of media and the decreased isolation of certain States and peoples. The latter is the more often criticised aspect of the phenomenon. It triumphs the end of nationalism (as if this were an inherently undesirable ideology). It is the form that observers see as lifting power and control from states (and so, if democratic, theoretically from people) and transferring power to unelected, unaccountable usually trade-related bodies, or dispersing power in private, less visible hands, leaving citizens vulnerable to decisions made by persons that they have not directly chosen.

### **3. Globalisation and Democracy: the ‘end of history’?**

- 3.1 Post-Cold War writers proposed that globalisation made democratisation inevitable. They stated that globalisation would be a catalyst for democratisation, its technological aspect, the ability to penetrate even the most closed societies, helping a contagion of democratic transitions across the world by the sweep or trickle of ideas and ideals across borders.<sup>8</sup>
- 3.2 However, a number of observers have noted that broad trends in the 1990s cannot confirm a strong and direct connection between globalisation and democratisation: Singapore, for example, is considered a very connected and ‘global’ place, in terms of cross-border contact, and yet shows few signs of increased democratisation.<sup>9</sup>
- 3.3 As Held has written, if many processes and outcomes of decisions stretch beyond frontiers, there are serious implications for ideas of democracy. Decisions are made in contexts beyond governmental and thus citizen control. The fact is that globalisation, the complex phenomenon, is deeply problematic to ‘the idea of a community which rightly governs itself and determines its own future’.<sup>10</sup>
- 3.4 Of course, citizens have always been subject in some sense to the consequences of decisions made elsewhere that impact upon them. One State could simply sniff and another would thereby catch a cold. Territorial lines were drawn across Africa around tables in Europe by persons acting by reference to local, European political imperatives. Not that much has changed.
- 3.5 The problem presented by globalisation is something more subtle and yet more pervasive: because power is less obviously state-centred, and decisions less obviously intended or likely only for or to have local effect, the citizen in even the most developed democracy is vulnerable in a way that was not as acute before relations, in particular economic, relations became so interlinked,

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<sup>8</sup> Catherin Dalpino, ‘Does Globalisation Promote Democracy’ *Brookings Review* (Fall 2001), Vol 19 No 4, 45-48, 45.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> David Held, ‘Globalisation and the Future of Democracy’ in Shapiro and Hacker-Cordsn (eds) *Democracy’s Edges* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

globalised, relative. Globalisation, it has often been pointed out, is not a political panacea, and is at best a long-term ally in promoting democracy, providing no automatic solutions. A related consideration is the effect of globalisation on democratic features such as citizenship and nationality.

- 3.6 It is necessary to comment on international organisations such as the WTO. A super-national body is perhaps acceptable in theory where individual states have accorded it legitimacy and where, within the body, there is a democratic process writ large. This might of course assume that the member States of such a body are themselves democratic States, so that the citizen's choice is in fact not removed but simply extended onto another level, represented.
- 3.7 It may be useful to draw a distinction between the composition of such bodies and the conduct of them. One might have a body composed of democratically elected member government representatives that is nevertheless not inclusive and participatory in its internal decision-making. On the other hand, one can conceive of an international body where members may have no popular mandate or legitimacy, but the procedure of the body is itself democratic.
- 3.8 Held has stated that we are 'compelled to recognise that we live in a complex, interconnected world' and that it is only appropriate that issues which as a matter of unavoidable fact now are transnational and more appropriately dealt with on that level by a relevant decision-making body or bodies.<sup>11</sup>
- 3.9 This is agreeable stuff. However, not only do institutions and accountability mechanisms need to be created to accord such bodies and their decisions legitimacy, attention must be given to the process by which citizen's choices at a local level are represented up the stages. Held has elsewhere written of a cosmopolitan model of democracy, necessary given a global and divided authority system of diverse and overlapping power centres, where people would hold in effect multiple citizenships according to the diverse political communities that exist on issues that affect them. He has noted the growth of "transnational civil societies" such as the environmental movement, and pointed to their existence as showing the direction – he is perhaps ultimately optimistic – in establishing the possibility of a broad cosmopolitan democracy holding transnational decisions accountable.<sup>12</sup>
- 3.10 It may be true to say that one area in which there is tangible evidence of globalisation's impact upon democratisation is the adoption and infusion of democratic ideals, and various human rights norms that support these, into the institutional frameworks and procedures of many international and regional bodies.<sup>13</sup> Dalpino notes that another level of democratisation assisted by the process is the growth of transnational NGOs devoted to democracy and human rights. So she states that the best chance in many states of building governmental democracy is a "gradual cross-over process, as NGO networks

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Dalpino, *op cit.*

pull government officials into ‘track two’ (mixed government and NGO) dialogues and other informal exercises.”<sup>14</sup>

- 3.11 In the post-Cold War 1990’s, commentators such as Francis Fukuyama triumphantly proclaimed ‘the end of history’ and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government: the market accepted it, and it satisfies fundamental human psychological needs.<sup>15</sup> At least he meant this in the sense that the ideology of liberal democracy is the final stage of political evolution, even if practice is another thing and lags behind. Obvious criticisms of Fukuyama aside, in that world it is becoming accepted that democracy is the foundation of domestic and international political legitimacy. International lawyers who used to speak of ‘self-determination’ have begun to speak of an emerging international law right, attaching to peoples, to democratic governance. A democratic form of government was not historically a condition for membership of the United Nations, unlike the European Community. However, it might become harder to imagine the creation of a new State resulting in widespread recognition without some form of democratic process as a feature of its political system or at least its birth. In this way it is said democracy has been globalised.
- 3.12 If it is to be spoken of in such terms, and if people are to continue to die to achieve it, it becomes important to examine what democracy is.
- 3.13 As a word, ‘democracy’ is part of daily public discourse, and the term ‘democratic’ has long ago ceased simply to be a description of the representative means by which an outcome is arrived at. It has become an ideal or value more complex than might be supposed, so that while rule by reference to the wishes of the majority is ‘democratic’, a simple majoritarian democracy is not seen as being particularly ‘democratic’ without, say, the trimmings of constitutionally entrenched rights or other limits on power in favour of minorities.
- 3.14 ‘Democracy’ is tossed in as a reference and rationale underpinning everything from ‘the War on Terror’ to minimal conditions of governance for the receipt of international aid and kudos. A reader’s letter to *Quadrant* magazine in May 2002 described how a democratic government ‘can range from totalitarian democracy to constitutional democracy’.<sup>16</sup> And as Susan Marks has written, governments with varying degrees of popular representation and accountability have often adopted the title, always in a justificatory political manner, using terms such as ‘one-party democracy’, or ‘people’s democracy’. The use of the term in multiple contexts is so common that, as Marks observed, at least as a term with any normative force, democracy appears to mean everything, and therefore nothing.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dalpino, op cit.

<sup>15</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

<sup>16</sup> Zelman Freeman, Letter to the Editor, *Quadrant* (May 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Susan Marks, ‘The End of History? Reflections on Some International Legal Theses’ (1999) *European Journal of International Law* Vol 8 No 3.

- 3.15 In Marks' view, it is important to distinguish the *concept* of democracy from the particular *conceptions* of democratic politics and their institutional manifestations. Democracy might broadly be defined as a practice wherein people choose (and then influence) those who govern.
- 3.16 That sort of definition is inadequate without a host of qualifications and elaborations, such as the quality of the choice, the climate of free speech and absence of intimidation in which it is exercised, the reasonable inclusiveness of a range of candidates, etc. Democracy in essence assures for people freedom from the exercise of potential power, and an array of lesser freedoms.<sup>18</sup> Democracy is an extremely complex yet concrete phenomenon – of choosing and participating and developing practical options within the common good.<sup>19</sup>
- 3.17 This is probably no place to consider academic debate over the definition and essential hallmarks of democracy, nor do I feel remotely qualified to do so. However, it is important to move beyond what are simply manifestations of a democratic process – electoral ballots, for example – and focus more on the ideal or concept behind this. Held has argued that a theoretical and practical acceptance and recognition of people's equal interests in self-determination and political autonomy, arising from his or her entitlements as a citizen, is at the heart of democracy. This recognition entails necessarily a common structure of political action for the shared enjoyment of a cluster of rights and obligations.<sup>20</sup> Susan Marks defines it as a general concept or ideal of self-rule on a footing of equality among citizens. Democracy, she writes, is an idea of potentially universal pertinence, notwithstanding its Western European historical roots.<sup>21</sup>
- 3.18 The danger, however, is its use as a legitimizing label. There is the danger of hijack, dilution, or corruption of the term, or an acceptance of a thin veneer of formal democracy as adequate. As democracy spreads (in the form of increasing numbers of states with a leadership chosen by universal suffrage in a multiparty contest), the danger is on the one hand of multiple 'low intensity' democracies (a term Marks uses), of cosmetic democracies, where people's aspirations of real participation in national life are shortchanged.
- 3.19 Eriksen has made a similar point, apparently drawing on Marks' writing:<sup>22</sup>

*Democracy is not only a set of rules for reaching binding decisions – it is made and remade in cultural traditions and in citizen's minds. It is embedded in a way of life.*

The philosopher John Ralston Saul put the same point this way in a lecture on ABC TV in 1999:<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ted Honderich, *Violence for Equality* (Routledge, London, 1989), p 158.

<sup>19</sup> John Ralston Saul, 'Democracy and Globalisation' Lecture, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1999. See [www.abc.net.au/specials/saul/fulltext.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/specials/saul/fulltext.htm)

<sup>20</sup> David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> Marks, op cit.

<sup>22</sup> Eriksen, op cit.

*Superficially it's true that there's never been so much democracy in the world, there's never been so many governments calling themselves democratic. The reality is year by year...we have actually been weakening the reality of the democracy...*

- 3.20 A problem with Fukuyama's theory is that it gives a conception of liberal democracy which cannot be improved upon. One of Marks' central points is that Fukuyama masks the fragility of liberal democracy, and thus reduces the possibilities for strengthening and improving it.<sup>24</sup> A narrow conception misses the opportunity to prompt those of us in the established democracies to ask how it is we can challenge ourselves in bettering our own democratic experience, and avoid settling for a comfortable, complacent, apathetic, and non-participatory national life, within a simplistic, undemanding conception of democracy. Moreover, things are not as settled as they seem. There is an internal ideological struggle for the meaning and characteristics of democracy.
- 3.21 It is inevitable that I attempt to offer something on democracy and violence, and terror. In doing so I probably go somewhat off the title of my paper.
- 3.22 In 2002 'democracy itself' is said to be under assault from organized terror, and observers are noting the tendency for 'other voices' to be labelled quasi-subversive.
- 3.23 Bernard Frick, making the point that democracy needs more than certain necessities, and involves the reconciliation of many inputs, rightly emphasised the importance of the open interplay of rival ideas, 'some tolerance of differing truths'.
- 3.24 Commentators are no doubt correct in saying that during security crises, the whole community accepts that it must give up some individual rights and liberties but that a robust political democracy ensures that these rights are restored when the crisis has passed. While most democracies are to a point self-limiting in the means by which their executive can act even where that action is designed to ensure the peace and security of citizens, it is important that concerns about security do not result in any hardening of the arteries.
- 3.25 The 'War on Terror', and all the changes it rings, is not likely to be a short-term phenomenon. We must look out for creeping limitations on real representation and participation that have no real security benefits. While security will be a paramount concern of citizens, it is important not to dry out the soil in which we can continue to cultivate the many fruits of democracy. Part of the robustness which enables democracies to survive security crises, comes from resisting the temptation to centralise, formalise, and control. As the Israeli Supreme Court has said in the context of the need for limits on State conduct in counter-terrorism operations:

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<sup>23</sup> Saul, op cit.

<sup>24</sup> Marks, op cit.

*We are aware that this judgment of ours does not make confronting that reality any easier. That is the fate of democracy, in whose eyes not all means are permitted, and to whom not all the methods used by her enemies are open. At times democracy fights with one hand tied behind her back. Despite that, democracy has the upper hand, since preserving the rule of law and recognition of individual liberties constitute an important component of her security stance. At the end of the day, they strengthen her and her spirit, and allow her to overcome her difficulties.*<sup>25</sup>

- 3.26 That is, if democracy itself is really under attack, its best defence is the example it shows of an equivalent form of ‘grace under fire’. The risk of course is that in ‘defending democracy’ against this invisible threat, we eat away at what we are supposedly fighting for.
- 3.27 At such a time it is particularly important to be aware, during the reconstruction of Timor-Leste, that setting priorities on formal measures such as institution-building must not obscure or marginalize civil society and community or ‘informal’ politics; that if ‘democracy’ is truly to find purchase in that country and permeate its daily life, it must be a more complex, rich form of democracy than the international community has, to date, accepted in other new nations. And at home we must remain democratic in substance and ideal, as well as in form.
- 3.28 What form and depth of democracy, then, will lead in Timor-Leste to a stable, competitive economy, effective popular control of public power, equal citizenship, government accountability, civilian control of the military, respect for human rights? What conception of democracy and what local mechanisms might prevent pervasive political and economic marginalization and exclusion from setting in even before the concrete is dry on the first post-independence public project? What do the Timorese people have ahead? What do we, who bring and who champion democracy to them, have to offer them by way of meeting their aspirations and expectations? Perhaps unavoidably and although blessed with some petroleum resources, Timor-Leste has already been assigned a place in the international economy. If we are indeed so interested in progress and upliftment and creating true conditions for peace and security, what can be done to avoid confining reconstructing and emerging nations like Timor-Leste, Mozambique and Afghanistan to being cosmetically-democratic producers of low-end goods? If, as Marks noted, the market is at best indifferent to many of the core democratic preoccupations, but if we are to impress upon people the benefits of liberal market democracy, how can we use our imagination and influence to spare them from what Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, quoted by Marks, called ‘this second-class, hand-me-down capitalism, ludicrous and doomed’.
- 3.29 Marks has drawn attention to the chronologies that international law and convention impose, often imperceptibly, upon reconstructing states, in the

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<sup>25</sup> Supreme Court of Israel HCJ 5100/94 *The Public Committee against Torture in Israel v. The State of Israel* 53(4) PD 817, 845.

form of models of market democracies.<sup>26</sup> Her arguments make compelling reading, and I would make no attempt to summarise them here. She did observe, though, that while political reconstructions appear to hold out the promise of catching up with the West, ‘much of what passes for political and economic reconstruction offers little real prospect of change’, or masks continuity as change. She notes that the end of the Cold War produced a movement of renewal for international law after that dark age when it was a victim of superpower rivalry. This renewal movement seemed to promise a new era where the rule of law would be a more meaningful concept in international relations.

- 3.30 According to Marks, embedded within international legal renewalism are ideological preferences for capitalism and democracy that are advanced through international law primarily at the behest of powerful liberal democracies, such as the United States. However, the result is often what Marks calls ‘pseudo-capitalism’ and ‘low intensity democracy’. Underneath the rhetoric about the renewal of international law and the democratic rule of law domestically remain vast economic inequalities, neo-authoritarian rule, and the deepening influence of hegemonic power. Formalism, ambiguity, and mystification characterize the use of international law in the renewalist vision of market democracy.
- 3.31 Whether or not one agrees with Marks, the message is certainly important: to critically analyse the structural features of our era in order to understand what forces may be at work. For my part, and which appear ultimately conservative in outlook, if a democratic transition is (or importantly, is perceived to be) a vehicle for other things, it will ultimately lack empirical legitimacy and thus be unsustainable in the long term. Even if one’s only interest is in long-term stability for economic investment purposes (and not for human development, quality participatory democracy, etc), that is a significant issue.

#### **4. Democracy and Governance**

- 4.1 No doubt ‘governance’ refers to something wider than democracy conceived of as electoral ballots. It includes financial accountability and transparency, international political activity, etc. But ‘good governance’ is also far narrower and more restricted a notion than democracy. I would prefer to think of ‘good governance’ as a manner of going about ones democratic duties of open government. It would be unfortunate if the emphasis came to be on ‘governance’ at the expense of ‘democracy’: for even the most undemocratic state can have an excellent ‘good governance’ rating. Governance and government are not the same thing. In an African development context, there may well be acceptable levels of good governance in the eyes of shareholders of investors, or lenders, or contributing member States of international organisations, that relate to accountability of, for example, a financial sort.

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Marks, ‘Guarding the Gates with Two Faces: International Law and Political Reconstruction’ in ‘Globalisation and the Rule of Law’, *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, Vol 6 Spring 1999 Issue 2.

- 4.2 It is sufficient to point out that governance, as the term is increasingly used and takes on a technical connotation, is not to be confused with democracy. Such 'governance' indicators give no indication of the citizen democratic or participatory element.<sup>27</sup>

## 5. An African perspective

- 5.1 So as to tie my earlier statements to the topic of the present conference, I intend to conclude with a few remarks about globalisation and democracy in Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That is rather bold, of course!
- 5.2 There are many studies of the peculiarly African and the universal in the history of democracy in Africa.<sup>28</sup> I do not purport to cover these in any detail.
- 5.3 I have noted how Marks (and others) cast doubt in 1999 on Fukuyama's expansive general claims made earlier that decade. In the same way, Joel Barkan has noted that a decade ago, in 1992, observers had concluded that Africa was on the cusp of a 'second liberation' and that the prospects for further democratisation in Africa were high, but that today these same observers would be less confident about democratic prospects.<sup>29</sup>
- 5.4 It is convenient to utilise Barkan's analysis. It is a recent, broad and persuasive one, even if the story is a familiar one. The perceived 'second liberation' in the 1990s followed the initial liberation that was the early 1960s transition from colonial to independent rule. The accompanying euphoria was of course as short-lived as the new democracies – they were displaced by military coups or by the crystallisation of liberation movements into autocratic one-party states led by particular and distinctive personalities. Plural participation was included and destroyed, or excluded and destroyed, or generally marginalised. This model – it is important to recall the Cold War context – dominated African countries in the 1970s and 1980s.
- 5.5 Barkan notes that the structural and normative legacy entrenched in this post-colonial period (of a governance pattern of patronage and corruption, personal charisma and pragmatism over any coherent policy and ideology, unsustainable macro-economic practices, and institutional decay) continues to undermine African democracies. Perhaps the most memorable reminder of the peculiar attitude towards the state, and the destructive effect this has had on African countries, is the following passage from legendary Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski's *The Shadow of the Sun* (Penguin, 2001):

*The colonial origins of the African state – a state wherein the civil servant received remuneration beyond all measure and reason –*

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<sup>27</sup> Cf Amrith, op cit, 8. Part of Amrith's study deals with democracy / participation concerns about the accountability of external (aid etc) interventions in Africa, given their vertical nature. Cf also Eriksen op cit.

<sup>28</sup> For a recent example, see Tunde Zack Williams (ed), *Africa in Crisis: New Challenges and Possibilities* (Pluto Press 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Barkan, 'Democracy in Africa: What Future?', *Harvard International Review*, XXIV, 2 (Summer 2002) pp 72-77.

*ensured that in independent Africa, the struggle for power instantly assumed an extremely fierce and ruthless character. All at once...a new ruling class arises – a bureaucratic bourgeoisie that creates nothing, produces nothing, but merely governs the society and reaps the benefits...once, decades, even centuries, were needed for a new social class to emerge, and here all it took was several days...the French...called the phenomenon la politique du ventre (politics of the belly), so closely was political appointment connected with huge material gains...*

- 5.6 The early 1990s, Barkan then notes, raised expectations of a revitalisation of African governance. Benin's celebrated multiparty elections in 1991 set in chain a wave which resulted in all but five of Africa's 47 states having enjoyed multiparty elections (of varying quality) by 2000.<sup>30</sup> However, incumbents tended to remain in at least de facto or patronage power. The democratic and electoral experience of course varies widely between different African countries.<sup>31</sup> Barkan's analysis of the fallout from the 1990s is only partly optimistic,<sup>32</sup> although it may be true to say that the wave at least produced some creeping advances in the consolidation of democracy as an ideal and a process, and provided encouragement to other political and civil actors that the democratic process was a viable one.<sup>33</sup>
- 5.7 Debate will no doubt continue with varying degrees of focus on what has been achieved as against what has yet to be accomplished, and so about whether, in terms of democratic progress, the African glass is half-empty or half-full.<sup>34</sup>
- 5.8 Reference should of course be made to the effect of IMF and World Bank ESAPs and other conditional aid, investment and loan agreements, most of which have carried with them standards relating to democratic practice as a part condition of the loan, aid etc. It is noted that often the West places faith in the indirect effects of globalisation: an authoritarian government agrees to a global regime to gain (usually economic) benefits but is forced to accept political consequences (pressure for democratisation). This process is based at least in part on a theory that 'open markets and democracy are the inspiration and consequence of one another.'<sup>35</sup> However, regimes often agree to the measures for pragmatic and not principled reasons; there may be some reform satisfying the outside policymakers but only obscuring and undermining further reform taking place: the regimes may agree to structural reforms in a way that allows reforms or opening up of government in a way that they are confident that they can control. And the economic effects of the programmes, with the insecurity they often lead to, might in fact lead to popular support or at least toleration of less than democratic rule,<sup>36</sup> or, if successful, increased support for a regime with no real commitment to reform for its own sake.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>33</sup> Cf Barkan, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Cf Barkan, op cit, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Dalpino, op cit.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Thus it is noted that globalisation has not necessarily increased democratisation where the effects of it have been to create a backlash and, for example, to feed nationalism in authoritarian, non-Western states. Dalpino notes as follows:<sup>37</sup>

*During the Asian economic crisis, anti-Western sentiment flared even in countries well on the road to democracy, such as Thailand, when catastrophic drops in currency values were attributed to manipulation by Western traders. In...Malaysia, ...leaders turned this new nationalism to their advantage by salting their political reforms with anti-Western (and anti-globalisation) rhetoric and portraying themselves as national champions.*

- 5.9 It is interesting to reflect on whether in seeking to achieve improved standards of government by tying money to these conditions, these institutions in fact undermined to a great degree the democratisation of relevant countries. It should also be recalled that the form or level of democratic practice required to meet the conditions is not necessarily a demanding one, with the obscuring effect that Marks has pointed out. The particular vulnerabilities of African states – economic, institutional, and other weaknesses – of course make the problem of globalisation (in the context of its effects on the ability of people to govern themselves) a particularly acute one.<sup>38</sup>
- 5.10 On the other hand, much of the fault for the failure of such programs, where they have failed, must be placed at the feet of African leaders themselves. Aside from the familiar endemic political instability and governance patterns, and the continued reluctance of African leaders to censure their peers (something I deal with in the context of NEPAD, below), a number of specific obstacles to further democratisation can be identified. It is worth considering these by reference to whether the forces of globalised influence, in their various forms, might have a positive effect on the quality and quantity of African democracy.
- 5.11 The strength of opposition parties, the court system, civil society and the media are critical indicators in democratisation. The media is one specific area where the effects of globalisation might be most visible: the reach of global media is difficult to gauge. In Africa, popular broadcast media tends to be state-owned,<sup>39</sup> and print media tends to be restricted to urban centres and to educated citizens. One problem is that of what standard of electoral process passes for a legitimising multi-party election. The danger of course is that expectations – foreign and local – become so lowered that a flawed process is deemed acceptable provided it represents an apparent attempt to go through the motions of seeking voter approval. I have already discussed the problem of thin democracy.
- 5.12 Barkan notes (in a tone that some might find disagreeable) that it is difficult to gauge the extent to which African people themselves have internalised

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Cf Amrith, op cit, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Barkan, op cit, 7.

democracy both as an ideal and as a system and process.<sup>40</sup> In many cases in the post-independence period, it is fair to say that citizens effectively acquiesced to one-party political systems where the ‘carrot’ was state provision of basic services.<sup>41</sup> In a climate of chronic material and physical insecurity, it is not surprising that commitment to democratic notions is to some extent contingent, in the mind of the man in the street, upon the perceived ability of the process to produce tangible benefits.

- 5.13 This may be what Barkan is partly referring to when he notes that Afrobarometer surveys suggest that popular support for democracy in African countries is a ‘mile wide but only an inch deep.’ Another way of understanding such results is to acknowledge that the form and conception of democracy that has become accepted in any one African country may be criticised from the outside for its lack of depth.
- 5.14 To my mind the suggestion that there is widespread but only thin support for democracy, if it is accurate at all,<sup>42</sup> probably reflects either a widespread support for a very dilute version of the ideal, or the contingency of any support, or the fact that however widespread support is for democratisation, the raw materials for its deepening – a developed civil society, robust media, basic material conditions, inter-ethnic and regional stability – are thin on the ground.
- 5.15 Of course I am conscious of straying too close to arguments – well used by many a despot – that seek to postpone further democratisation and enjoyment of political rights until a certain level of economic development or security has been consolidated. Democratic participation is not merely a luxury, a system that kicks in when times are good only to be suspended in more austere times, although these may necessarily bring increased regulation. Instead I think it should be acknowledged that citizens living in poor social and economic conditions with, say, the accompanying spectre of possible inter-ethnic violence, might perceive the full multi-party electoral process, with its accompanying to-and-fro of opinions and criticisms, to be potentially divisive and so dangerous. In such a climate, democratic enthusiasm may well be understandably dulled. To suggest this is often to earn the ire of those who assert that democracy is all and at all costs. This only serves to emphasise the need to analyse what is meant by ‘democracy’ in any context, its content, its quality.
- 5.16 A more satisfying approach might be to acknowledge that material poverty and economic marginalisation might not affect the emergence of democracy, but will undoubtedly affect its sustainability.<sup>43</sup> As Amrith has pointed out, in

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>41</sup> Amrith, op cit, 4.

<sup>42</sup> A more sophisticated analysis might have distinguished support for democracy (as an idea) from the extent to which it actually holds its ground in an observable, empirical sense. Democracy may be thin on the ground, but the belief in it is not necessarily as thin. This is subject to the point I make about the contingency and pragmatism with which the ideal is held.

<sup>43</sup> Przeworski et al, in Barkan, op cit, 9. Barkan notes that the issue is competition for scarce resources which in wealthier states are allocated to some or all groups making a claim on the State. He also

setting the modern African context of, by and large, impoverishment and marginalisation, the cumulative result of various familiar pressures has been to greatly erode political authority on the continent,<sup>44</sup> a statement that is not complete without a number of qualifications that account for the degree of blame, if that is not too strong a word, that one sometimes intuitively feel like apportioning to the people themselves for the state in which they find their political systems.

- 5.17 Conscious of some degree of sensitivity in those who see Africa as an homogenous victim, I am comforted in making this blame-apportionment remark by the fact that, if it was not already obvious, the New Partnership for Africa's Development 2001 (NEPAD) itself expressly acknowledges the need for African leaders to take on responsibility for the state of the continent.
- 5.18 Other obstacles to further democratisation (listed by Barkan) include:
- Large proportions of African societies are rural and agrarian. People retain strong community and locality attachments. Thus they usually attach their political interests – their interests and identity *qua* citizen – in terms of where they live or hail from rather than on the basis of class or perhaps independently and deliberately chosen identification with a candidate's ideology or policies.
  - This phenomenon is highlighted by the fact that many parties are ethnically based rather than based on interests that transcend ethnic identity.<sup>45</sup>
  - There is a poorly-developed middle class outside of the usually large civil service, which is dependent on the State. The State is seen as a vehicle for the accumulation of wealth, both by leadership and State employees.<sup>46</sup>
- 5.19 Barkan's outlook is that there will be further sophistication and development of the few African countries recognised as consolidated democracies. Until some of the newer democracies have experienced multiple turnovers of government, it is difficult to be optimistic. A great deal depends on reinforcing civil society and key independent institutions. It is also useful to bear in mind that a perhaps related phenomenon to globalisation is that of 'localisation':

*...[T]he weakness of democracy in some spheres – the absence of open political competition, for example – can be at least partly mitigated by other sorts of democracy, perhaps in the form of political participation at a local level.<sup>47</sup>*

- 5.20 There could quite as easily be erosion of accumulated progress. Where the democratisation process has already stalled, Barkan sees less sunny prospects:

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notes, without explaining the source of the figures, that democracies with a per capita income of less than \$1,000 per annum "last" an average of just over 8 years.

<sup>44</sup> Amrith, op cit, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Barkan, op cit, 10. See also Mamdani in Amrith, op cit, 7 fn 30.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Amrith, op cit, 17.

progress, if any, would be, he suggests, incremental and protracted. Nor should one assume that progress will occur on a linear basis through a series of defined stages: instead it is likely to be uneven and halting.<sup>48</sup>

- 5.21 It is worthwhile to reflect, as Barkan does in concluding, that critics of African democratisation often overlook the fact that the developed, mature democracies of the West evolved over more than just a century. It might be added to this that they did so, at least towards the end, at a time of unparalleled economic growth, expansion and general material upliftment. One needs no empirical study or elaborate argument to suggest that the quality and sustainability of African democracies is directly related to the material well-being of local people. On the other hand, the colonial legacy, structural adjustments and the current economic marginalisation are not a sufficient explanation for Africa's poor performance on democratic 'governance'. That is to say, commitment to democratic processes and ideals by African leaders is itself a condition to sustainable economic development and growth. That commitment does not require pre-existing material conditions, save for a basic stability.
- 5.22 In this light I turn to consider the NEPAD governance initiative. If Africa has responded to the globalisation of democracy by a renewed commitment to democratic ideals and practices, what is the content or standard of democracy that NEPAD actually sets out?

## **6. NEPAD, democracy and governance**

- 6.1 I will try to briefly discuss the twin ideas of NEPAD and the Millennium African Project (MAP). The key theme to MAP is the call for a united commitment by African leaders to take responsibility for addressing the economic and political marginalisation and exclusion of its people. The African Renaissance Institute has been set up, dedicated to 'the creation of conditions for sustained democracy'. The focus on governance is clear: 'Now more than ever before', President Mbeki said at its launch, 'we are in a position to consolidate our democracies'.
- 6.2 A premium is put by the international community on transparency and good governance, and at the very core of NEPAD is the notion of external peer review and the standards of good governance contained in the 'Democracy and Political Governance Initiative (DPGI)'. But the credibility of both NEPAD and the MAP have been under intense international scrutiny since.
- 6.3 Overseas analysts found his uncritical behaviour curious, remarking that the apparent indifference of the South African government to the plight of Zimbabwean voters was extraordinary in the light of South Africa's own recent political history. The ambivalent stance of course also affected international economic confidence in South Africa and the Rand.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 12.

- 6.4 However, the issue is not without complexity – few overseas media observers have pointed out that South Africa has much more at stake than most of those pressuring Mugabe. Outright condemnation and isolation of its neighbour, in the face of the looming humanitarian crisis, might have had highly unpredictable results for the stability of South Africa and the region. Instead of criticism, and as well as his actions for the Commonwealth, Mbeki pursued, and still pursues, a policy of quiet diplomacy with Mugabe. As far as NEPAD is concerned, observers remark that one explanation for Mbeki's response might be a fear of losing African support for NEPAD, aware that other African leaders may fear creating any precedent.
- 6.5 There may be alternatives to South Africa's policy of quiet diplomacy. Ceasing present engagement and allowing the Zimbabwe situation to evolve without involvement or public comment may do lasting damage to South Africa's credibility. The question, though, is whether any effective peer pressure will be forthcoming. The NEPAD Secretariat hopes African leaders will accept the peer review principle at the upcoming African Union summit, while South African ministers have excitedly said that peer review itself is only about a year away.
- 6.6 Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano said at the WEF Africa Economic Summit in Durban in May that is too early to use Zimbabwe as a test case for the peer review mechanism because the political and economic problems in Zimbabwe had come before the whole concept of peer review was settled and understood. However, as Greg Mills of the South African Institute of International Affairs pointed out last month, while the South African government has attempted to avoid this portrayal, Zimbabwe is seen abroad as a real test of the will of African governments to self-sanction fellow leaders and act on their stated commitments. NEPAD is a partnership with developed countries, and, whether the South African government likes it or not, these partner countries perceive the handling of Zimbabwe as crucial to whether Africa means business and is prepared to reform its political paradigm. 'After all', Mills asks 'if not Zimbabwe, what other state, when and how'?
- 6.7 If, then, as Johannesburg's *Business Day* likewise commented in March, Zimbabwe is 'a test case of South Africa and Africa's sincerity in their battles to be taken seriously and as equal partners by the rest of the world', there is no higher priority than ensuring 'the conditions for sustained democracy' are entrenched. Such conditions no doubt require a ground-level stability that may be the underlying reason for South Africa's choice of quiet diplomacy over any overt condemnation of Mugabe. However, at some point fidelity to democratic principles and practice must become the publicly-articulated basis of operation. Otherwise, NEPAD and MAP will be drained of any meaningful content.
- 6.8 Ghana's independence leader Kwame Nkrumah believed that since the world only had regard for size and influence, Africa's priority was unity. However, the modern world, and its international policy-makers, donors, and investors, has an equally high regard for political accountability and good governance. African people, increasingly fluent in expressing democratic ideals in

detectable ways, demand the same. It may be that there is an ongoing, calculated African solution to Zimbabwe's political crisis, and that Mbeki's ambitious plan to kick-start Africa's rise out of poverty will emerge intact.

- 6.9 The title of my paper has been 'Globalisation and Democracy: Spreading but Thinning?' It is not to be assumed, and Africa is as good a case in point as any, that 'good' globalisation will bring with it, necessarily, a form of democracy at all, or a form that is satisfying and not merely cosmetic. But nor can globalisation be blamed. Even in African countries with a fairly consolidated democracy (and this may be true of more established Western democracies), it is evident that African leaders have lost what Chinua Achebe has spoken of as those vital inner links to their own people. The shared vulnerability that a globalised world brings cannot be used to explain why this is so.

## **7. Conclusion: looking at Timor-Leste**

- 7.1 If I were to offer any conclusion that aimed at the topics dealt with at this conference generally, it might be this. Some topics in the Draft Programme (at least proposed ones) deal with the effects of globalisation on traditional authority and community dispute resolutions. It may be that what I am saying reflects nothing more surprising than a predictable swing of the pendulum in resistance against outside, uncontrollable forces of change. If one is familiar with a variety of African cultural political traditions, it is surprising that these links between people and their leaders have become so distant, the leaders so inaccessible and perhaps indifferent.
- 7.2 This is a critical point of view. An optimistic reflection on this view might be that democratisation, an enriching and deepening of people's control over their own lives, begins with these vital links. To the extent that 'good' globalisation increases people's awareness of their democratic entitlements, it may be that the spreading of democracy might result in a deepening of participation by people at a local and community level (something which has perhaps never been lost, and was insufficiently nurtured as the basis of the State – bottom up), with possible upwards influence of this participation.
- 7.3 'Localisation' thus might, in a paradoxical way, be the fruit of global influence. Combined with increasingly sophisticated transnational accountability mechanisms, and so some form of representation on a global level however abstract, it may be that this top-down and bottom-up influence will lead to democratisation of State political processes however resistant these are to change.
- 7.4 What sort of national life will Timorese citizens really enjoy, and how can our decisions affect the quality of their democratic experience? Will it be the case that, as Marks wrote (in 1999, in the context of the new democracies of the early 1990's), 'after so many national conferences, new constitutions, and multiparty elections, supported by so many grassroots networks and armies of international consultants and observers, the democratic ideals of self-rule and equality appear (at least) as remote as they ever were in many Third World

countries'? How are decision-makers in the developed world going to treat Timor-Leste in a way that will counter the considerable criticism of those commentators, and citizens, who see the democratic apparatus of newer nations only as cosmetic, as convenient thresholds reached so as to 'remove political barriers to the entry of capital'? Will their democratic experience go any deeper than is necessary for this? If in Australia, as a developed country, and even out of sheer self-interest, we are truly interested in long term security and stability, what form of democracy will do? If, as neighbours and global citizens, we are interested in the welfare of the Timorese for their sakes, what form will we, looking on, accept and ask no more?

- 7.5 Democratic progress is not necessarily something that can be ticked off by election observers. Progress towards the ideal of self-rule on an equal footing requires the enriching of existing democracies even while the phenomenon spreads across the globe. Democracy may be a matter of degree. There is always space for us to ask how democratic – in form and substance – the processes are by which decisions affecting our lives are made, and what can be done to increase participation of individuals and countries on an equal footing, particularly when many of the decisions that most profoundly affect us now take place at a corporate and international level well beyond any local means of calling such things to account. For while it is said that international terrorism threatens to undermine democratic states, other forces have at least as great an eroding effect on the sovereignty and independence of peoples.
- 7.6 In the reconstruction process in Timor-Leste, it will be remarked in the coming months that political and military stability and basic economic progress are a priority. It will be said that a certain quality of democratic experience is conditional upon achievement of various economic and other indicators, which may realistically never be achieved. But in Timor-Leste, as in our ongoing attempts as Australians to enrich and thus strengthen our democracy, it is important to ensure an intense, active, complex, non-cosmetic democracy. And to be aware what is lost, in a world focused on security, in any preoccupation with formal democracy, with governance, State, and sovereignty, and with treating these as somehow being sufficient and prior, as against the individual voice, 'differing truths', plurality and inclusion, respect for civil society, and addressing the consequences of globalization in a deeper democracy.

Thank you.