Chapter 10
Democracy for Peace and Development: An Ever-Expanding Agenda

10.1 Politics as the Search for Balance

Politics is conflict resolution.[1] Good conflict resolution is based on empathy with the concerns of all parties, on creativity (development!), and nonviolence (peace!). Democracy claims to know how to do this. But democracy is also subject to dialectics. Democracy should never become rigid but be innovative, not only be a source of innovation. Democracy can be seen as a way of making development and peace sustainable; in and with nature, and as human, social and world growth and peace. If we want development and peace to be enduring conditions in Time, then political development becomes a part of social development and democracy development a part of political development. Any type of development is process, so these two processes must also be sustainable.

Democracy, however, is not unproblematic as a concept. Four words: rule, rulers, ruled and rules, can be combined to build a simple definition: *Democracy is rule according to rules that make the rulers accountable to the ruled*. The definition is general and opens for two interpretations.

In Democracy A decisions are based on consensus, after a dialogue, with everybody, rulers and ruled, participating.

In Democracy B decisions are based on majority rule after voting, with everybody, rulers and ruled, participating.

Democracy A is what we associate with 'tribal' politics, and high level political bodies with consensus rules.

Democracy B is what we associate with Western, Athenian or Westminster, democracy, so far only about 2,500 years old.

In Democracy A the basic instrument is the *dialogue*, an exchange of arguments with no beginning and no end, much like a conversation. There is no winner and no loser, as opposed to Democracy B where the basic instrument is the *debate*. In fact, mature democracy presupposes both; dialogue toward consensus in the

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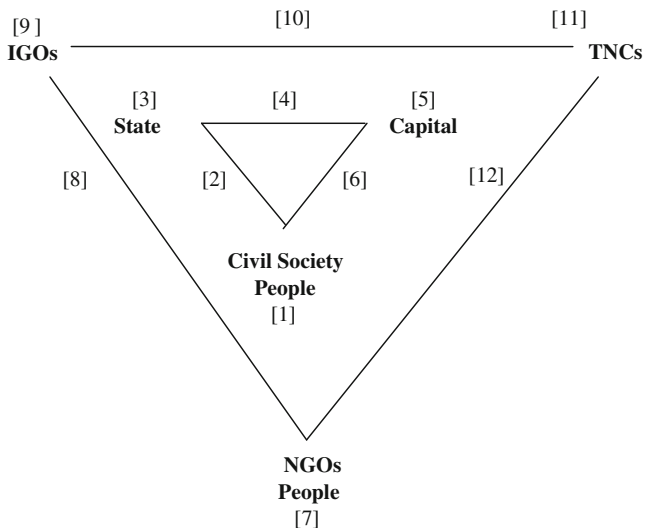
Fig. 10.1 Six units and their relations for democratization. *Source* The author

smaller groups, debates toward majority in the larger settings. The question is, which are these settings? What is it that has to be ruled and run in a democratic manner, particularly if we want a political system so subtle and so sensitive that it can catch small signals from the people and convert them into concrete ideas that can be put on the agenda and ultimately also into practice?

One answer to that critical question might flow from the general observation that the general *Society* model practiced all over the world today, "modern" society, for good or for bad, rests on three pillars, all more or less well developed: *Civil Society*, *State* and *Capital*. There are people all over. The overwhelming majority are in Civil Society, the sum total of all the organizations, including families and clans, people organize. For State and Capital the focus is on the people running those institutions, not on the numerous employees.

All three have their *World* counterparts. The States come together in the International Govern-mental Organizations, the IGOs, particularly the UN. Capital comes together in the Transnational Corporations, the TNCs. And the civil societies come together in the international civil society, the NGOs in UN jargon, nongovernmental organizations (international peoples' organizations, IPOs, is a better expression). That gives us six units and their relations for democratization (Fig. 10.1).

There is the inner triangle at the level of Society, and the outer triangle at the level of the World. Obviously, *if the market is globalizing so must democracy*; in fact, it should have been ahead of the market rather than as now be lagging behind. In each triangle, there are three "pillars" and three relations between these pillars; $3 + 3 = 6$. And then, with two triangles we get $2 \times 6 = 12$ queries: how could unit or relation become more democratic, or democratic at all?

Democracy, rule by the *demos*, the people, as opposed to the rule by the gun, the decree or the money of the military, intellectual or merchant elites, is here seen as *bene per se*. What else should be the purpose of rule than people, and who know better what they want than the people themselves? Of course people like everybody else make mistakes, but then it is their mistakes. And people like everybody else grow by taking on the challenge of making decisions and living by the consequences of those decisions. If in addition democracy could have built into it an element of *biocracy*, of rule for, by and of life, not only humans but Life as such would stand out as the highest value. But that is not, or at least not yet, a part of the dominant Western political culture.

Let us now proceed point by point:

[1] *Democratizing the People and Civil Society*. If democracy is not only for the people but also by the people, then it is in the people that democracy has to be built. Education enters as the basic instrument; and if the structure rather than the word is the message this would call for participatory schools, filled with dialogue and debate, not only one-way teaching. Not only exchange of words to outwit the other side, but the joy of the brainstorming, of exploring and discovering together, the synergies of minds opening up to each other. May be with more focus on how to obtain consensus than on how to win a debate; the latter is often uncomfortably similar to a fight. And the culture of democracy has to have nonviolence as a cornerstone. The problems we must come to grips with in the near future are so enormous that the culture of violence will easily take root in very fertile soil.

One point more about the culture of dialogue as opposed to debate. Dialogues in principle lead to deeper understanding of the other side. Not all truth rests with one side, as the vote cutting through a debate might make us believe. Even majorities may be wrong. If the issue is public sector versus private sector, or State versus Capital, then a debate will tend to end in favour of one or the other (in the age of the merchant with the latter). A dialogue will incorporate valid points from both and tend to end in favour of both—and rather than an either-or. In this particular case, there are at least three both-ands: the social democratic solution, the Japanese formula and the Chinese yin/yang, switching from one to the other, trying to get the best of both. Eclecticism, in short.

[2] *Democratizing the relation between People and State*. This is, of course, where most of the theory and practice about democracy has traditionally been located. The Ruled are the People, the Rulers have been located in the State. We shall question that later; suffice it here to say that there are two traditional solutions:

– *indirect democracy, or 'parliamentocracy'*. Based on freedom of thought, speech and assembly, on secret ballot to elect representatives and an executive accountable to the Assembly of those representatives, this institution remains a pillar of human development. In principle it allows for not only majority rule (or at last the majority of the representatives) but also for a nonviolent transfer from one set of rulers, with one agenda for the society, to the next set of rulers with

another agenda. In other words, nonviolent agenda change, not only nonviolent ruler change.

– *direct democracy through referendum and initiative*. The latter is crucial. A referendum may also be a strategy used by the Rulers to overrule the Assembly; the initiative guarantees that the Rules can also initiate the referendum process and that the Rulers have to abide by the outcome. This may certainly also be a strategy to get around the Assembly. In other words, direct democracy can serve as a corrective on indirect democracy, complementing it; a reason why parliamentarians so often are against it. Measured by this standard there is only one democracy in the world, Switzerland, which with 1/1,000 of the world population accounts for 60 % of the national referenda in this century.

Both direct and indirect democracy can also be *local*.

[3] *Democratizing the State*. The point here would not be to have votes inside all ministries, but to develop further other aspects of the culture of democracy. Thus, one basic point is transparency. Freedom of Information acts fall in this category as terribly important instruments to make the House of the Rulers more accessible so that the Ruled can feel at home. Investigative journalism is another approach, but much too dependent on the individual journalist.

Another point is better education of the Rulers, whether they are in the Legislative, the executive or the Judiciary. Better understanding of the culture, theory and practice of democracy is indispensable for the Rule of Law to function. But ruling elite should also be able to foresee, not in order to outwit the People but in order to be prepared for what the People might demand. And that may not necessarily coincide with what the Rulers have planned for them. Both may be wrong, there is no idea here that Truth and/or Virtue is located in only one or a few of the points in the diagram. But if we go by the rules of democracy the agendas of the rulers have to yield to the agendas of the people.

[4] *Democratizing the relation between State and Capital*. This relation is, of course, absolutely crucial. There should be an open, transparent channel for permanent dialogue where the concerns of either 'pillar' can become known to the other side. In the absence of such channels lobbies, pressure groups and corruption will fill the void, grossly distorting any democratizing of the People-State relationship. For that reason the State-Capital channel should be open to the People, meaning that such dialogues should take place in public space.

At this point, something more about 'public space'. The ballot booth stands in public space but the act is not public; it is not only secret but also lonely (the curtain is drawn). In public space verbal and other acts are observed by others, and there is feedback. Ample, diverse, accessible public space is indispensable for democracy. In practice this means readers' access to newspapers (and not only as short OpEds), viewers' and listeners' call-in access to electronic media, ample physical space in buildings and open squares etc. for meetings, also improvised, easy Internet access.

But then there is also the problem of content. One particular articulation of Civil Society, the party system, has to learn how to make posters, ads and sound/view-bites: with content. A poster only with a head, the name of the party and an empty slogan is an insult to the People. At least some parts of the party program could be given, with some empty space for passers-by to write in their comments. Thus, there is much to learn from the Chinese wall poster tradition. Politicians have become too infatuated with the intellectual level of the merchant, advertising, and should learn to rise above that abyss.

One good substitute for old village squares is the shopping mall, known in the Middle East tradition as the *souk*. We must learn better how this precious public space can become the Hyde Park corners of the world. There is nothing like real people meeting real people in a real setting, any mediation through media will always introduce an element of virtual reality. Free availability of public space is as important for democracy as education, and should be guaranteed.

[5] *Democratizing Capital*. Again a basic point is transparency, and one formula is industrial democracy, whether it takes the form of quality circles, assemblies, *congestion*, whatever. However, one point is often lost sight of: how to make the company more transparent to the outside, to the potential customers or clients. Ideally there should be dialogue cycles involving employers-employees-customers; a pattern which might also be in the interest of the Rulers, the company owners. Instead of spying on customers through market surveys, how about a dialogue about possible new products? How about taking people and their tastes seriously instead of trying to twist and shape them? How about expanding the cooperative tradition to the customers?

[6] *Democratizing the relation between People and Capital*. Today much of the relation takes the form of advertizing, in other words of idiotizing, one-way messages designed not to engage in any dialogue but to lure, persuade without even a debate. The argument that nobody is forced to buy the product bypasses the basic point: the ad as an insult not only to human intelligence, but as a subversion of the democratic tradition of message and counter-message, the verbal give and take. Hence, as a very minimum there should be to constraints on advertising: the readiness to provide more text, more information, and the willingness to engage in dialogue. No ad without equal space and time to challenge, for instance in radio and TV debates about precisely the products advertised. Today, however, advertising is almost taboo. Like the priest in church the merchant advertising cannot be contradicted, and to have serious doubts about the message is defined as libel.

[7] *Democratizing the International Civil Society*. Essentially this is the world version of [1] above. But there are also some additional points relating to the NGO as a way of bringing together people from all over the world. Thus, does the organization have a reasonably democratic structure and process, or does it have a self-appointed President, for life? Is there a democratic dialogue inside the organization? Is the organization reasonably representative not only of the continents

but of the civilizations of the world? Does it have a headquarter only in the world Northwest, or does it have some kind of rotation pattern giving the chance to others to share the spin-offs from international organizations?

[8] *Democratizing the relation between People/NGOs and the UN*. In this field there are two very interesting institutions to build on: the Consultative Status given to a number of NGOs by the UN and the Specialized Agencies, and the NGO conferences parallel to the major UN conferences on special topics. Actually, national democracies might have something to learn from this: having an active civil society and not only the party system discussing the agenda of the national assembly at the same time, and close in space.

But this could be developed much further. Why not aim for a *United Nations People's Assembly*, a UNPA, in addition to the UNGA, the United Nations General (or Governments') Assembly?[2] Based on NGOs, or, better, on direct vote with each member state as a constituency and one representative per million inhabitant? If the European Union and the Indian Union can do it, why not also the World? And then, a gradual process of transfer of power from UNGA to UNPA, to people.

[9] *Democratizing the United Nations/IGOs*. In addition to the arguments about transparency and education, some of the points made under [7] above apply. Thus, how about rotating the headquarter? The UN does not belong to the West, the US, New York state, New York City, Manhattan, East River. It belongs to the world as an expression of the aspirations of people, states and what not all over the world. Fifty years in the West (by 1995) may be enough; how about East Asia in general and perhaps Hong Kong in particular for the next 50 years? And, how about Freedom of Information Acts, the way the European Union is slowly accepting?

[10] *Democratizing the relations between the UN and the TNCs.* The argument is the same as for [4] above: a vacuous relation is easily filled with lobbies and corruption (as the European Commission knows only too well). One possible approach would be for the UN to create a *United Nations Corporate Assembly*, a UNCA, as a consultative organ. Both the UNGA and the UNPA might demand of the UNCA to come up with plans for decreasing environmental destruction and increasing gainful employment, in a triangular dialogue essential to global democracy.

[11] *Democratizing the TNCs*. The argument and the suggestions would be a combination of [5], [7] and [9] above. Very basic is rotation of headquarters to make them truly transnational, the TNCs probably being more flexible in this.

[12] *Democratizing the relation between People and TNCs*. The arguments from [6] below apply. The TNCs would do well to have dialogue with people outside their own board-rooms, not only to steer clear of boycott actions, but also to become better at making products that satisfy people's basic needs.

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[2] The ideas about the UN are developed further in a paper written for the Independent Commission on Global Governance, and published by them, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Further Readings

Galtung J (2001) "Democracy: Dialogue for Consensus or Debate for Majority?", in: Jean-Paul, Harpes; Lukas K. Sose (Eds.): *Demokratie im Focus/La Democratie en Discussion/ Democracy Reconsidered. Dokumentation des Kolloquiums Neue Wege der Demokratie (Luxemburg 14.-17.12.1995)*. (Münster, Hamburg, Berlin, London: Lit-Verlag): 62–65.

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