Global Politics and Institutions

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Introduction

A familiar refrain in our time is that humanity is at a crossroads with respect to dealing with multiple threats to its preservation as a species: poverty, widespread violence, dangerous illnesses, environmental catastrophes, and social breakdown. While we may have only a narrow window of opportunity to overcome these crises, a well-worn set of themes have been proposed to manage them: investments and financial transfers to the South to kick-start income generation opportunities; improved technology and coordinated policies to address economic, environmental, and health concerns; and genuine international cooperation towards peace and security. Sadly, though not unexpectedly, one senses only fatigue and frustration in policy-makers' continued attempts to apply these policies, with little to show for their efforts as existing problems worsen and new dangers appear on the horizon. The trouble seems to be that, barring a substantial reorientation in our shared understanding of human progress and solidarity, in the absence of clear visions of alternative common futures, and without clear pathways for getting there, we may be doomed to adopt fragmented and incomplete solutions to address the great challenges of the twenty-first century. On the other hand, as the other papers in this series reiterate, we may yet be able to engender a substantial shift—a *Great Transition*—in human attitudes and behavior towards sustainability to set in motion the technical, institutional, and social changes needed to meet the multiple challenges to humanity in a timely manner.

One of the salient premises of the *Great Transition* thesis is that we are in a planetary phase of civilization, implying that we are at the beginning of a fundamentally new type of engagement with history (Raskin et al., 2002). New opportunities and threats accompany our greater global connectivity and heightened disjunctures around nation, ethnicity, and class. If the past is any guide, major social transformations have taken place during similar "cusps" whose objective reality was in the changing relations among human formations, nature, and technology. But these changes during different epochs have been accompanied as much by large catalytic events—or revolutions—as by gradual evolutionary change in behavior, attitudes, and forms of political organization. Neither the direction nor the character of these shifts could have been fully anticipated, given the exigencies of the rush of events as well as the power relations that were formed in particular places and times. Yet, collective imagination and visionary leadership were influential in shaping at least some aspects of change, particularly in later periods, where print media were able to disseminate ideas more widely.

This paper emphasizes the political and institutional dimensions of a *Great Transition* world, and in doing so develops a hopeful vision of alternative forms of collective action. Thus, it tries to outline the politics and institutions that would be most compatible with meeting humanity's complex and manifold goals, even as other social, technological, and economic transformations take place. Its primary focus is the institutional arrangements that would facilitate a democratic global politics in the future, but it also lays out some current trends that show promise towards realizing such a future. As in companion pieces of this report series, the following format is adopted: a definition of the problem, a brief discussion on its history and context, an imagined future of politics and institutions in a

Great Transition world, and contemporary political debates and activity that provide inspiration for realizing that future.

Rationale: Why "Politics" and Why "Global?"

The *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought* defines politics as the "process whereby a group of people, whose opinions or interests are initially divergent, reach collective decisions which are generally regarded as binding on the group, and enforced as common policy". A curious feature of this definition is its omission of the inevitable conflicts that arise during such a process. In the popular imagination, after all, politics is most closely associated with a struggle for ascendancy among groups having different priorities and power relations. Even when the outcomes are broadly satisfactory, politics is viewed by most people as a "necessary evil", necessary because it provides a forum for moving forward as a society that needs to come up with binding policies, and evil, or at least distasteful, because the process more often than not involves individuals negotiating their way through unpleasant and morally suspect paths. Ultimately, though, a successful politician is not only someone who skillfully manages conflict while appeasing the needs of multiple groups, but who also goes on to develop, and has the authority to enforce, new policy that is binding on everyone.

A simpler if unusual definition of politics is that it is simply an old art of navigating through tensions among multiple "I"s and the "we" to achieve collectively desired ends. The character and form this art takes may vary with the type of social organization, level of engagement, and existing distribution of power. But in all cases, political strategies are deemed successful when the interests and actions of different individuals and stakeholder groups are aligned in a practical way towards roughly common objectives. The study of politics relates, then, to several issues, including: a definition of the political community (the "we"), the types of interests and power relations that exist within it, the articulation of the collective interest and its associated policies, and the opportunities and means for resolving conflicts and reaching group aims in a legitimate (i.e., acceptable to dominant power brokers) and effective (i.e., capable of reaching their elected outcomes) manner.

Virtually every type of politics is organized around a community of actors who have some sort of collective self-identity as a "people". For much of human history, the only significant examples of such political communities were those tied to the (more or less) territorial boundaries of tribes, cities, and states. In other words, the "we" in whose name politics has traditionally been conducted has tended to be a sub-unit of humanity as a whole. Beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing sporadically through the present period, Marxists, human rights advocates, environmentalists, peace activists, feminists and, most recently, *dalits* (or indigenous peoples) have all extended the domain of the political to mean much, if not all, of humanity. These so-called "internationalists", while having distinct philosophical and political positions, are generally agreed that groups across the world should feel strong cross-boundary affiliations because their long-term mutual interests are likely to be more significant than those of the individual nations or other territorially bound entities to which they may belong.

Definitions: Politics, governance, institutions, and organizations

It is useful to distinguish *politics*, which is one of the main subjects of this paper, from *governance*, a term that is more salient within professional policy discourse. *Governance* typically refers to management and administrative arrangements, and is concerned primarily with the formulation of proper rules and sufficient checks and balances to ensure a well-functioning government. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it thus*: "The manner in which something is governed or regulated; method of management, system of regulations." Politics*, on the other hand, is about the very power relations that routinely confound "good governance". Good politics usually means that one is able to develop lasting compromise solutions to keep different stakeholders (i.e., individuals and groups with different levels of power and interests) in a state of abatement with respect to each other, often not because their specific interests were met but because they have swapped them for something else, or there are net losers who are unhappy but decide to bide their time.

In common parlance, *institutions* are understood to be organizations that tend to persist over time. A stricter definition, and closer to the one I use here, is to treat the word as the noun form of the verb root: "to institute", i.e., to put into practice, to habituate. Thus, one meaning of institutions in the OED is "the giving of form or order to a thing; orderly arrangement; regulation". Related to this is "an established law, custom, usage, practice, organization, or other element in the political or social life of a people; a regulative principle or convention subservient to the needs of an organized community or the general ends of civilization". Douglass North, one of the leading exponents of New Institutional Economics, defines institutions as "the humanly devised constraints that structure human interaction. They are made up of formal constraints (rules, laws, constitutions), informal constraints (norms of behavior, conventions, and self imposed codes of conduct), and their enforcement characteristics. Together they define the incentive structure of societies and specifically economies" (North 1993).

The term *global institutions* (or global institutional arrangements), as used here, refers to the types of rules, practices, and constitutional and legal arrangements that either already exist at the global level or those that we can conceive of as being necessary to generate non-violent politics in a *Great Transition* world. As we shall see below, however, both global and local institutions will be transformed in the course of realizing such a future. Finally, the bodies that institute or govern, such as courts, legislatures, administrative agencies, the executive, and so on are typically termed *organizations*.

In a formal sense, politics is most often tied to the actions of powerful groups controlling relatively large territorially bound entities. Over the past 350 years or so, in the aftermath of deadly conflicts in Europe, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) led to broad recognition that territorial powers should largely be left alone and be afforded the status of "sovereignty", i.e., the ability to conduct their internal affairs without outside interference (cf. Krasner 1999). On the other hand, colonialism, slavery, and imperial conquests in vast regions of the world outside Europe continually defied the spirit of Westphalia. Still, the international system that was developed during the twentieth century has tried at least nominally to respect the principle, except insofar as it has been disturbed by the Cold War, Security Council antics, and a few cases of egregious human rights violations within states that have called for urgent outside intervention.[*]

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[*] Sadly, there are no clear rules of intervention and the decisions made by the Security Council are increasingly dominated by the narrow politics of quid pro quo among the five permanent members who tend to form odd coalitions around any specific situation. This is true especially of so-called "humanitarian interventions", where strategic interests of the five are typically more significant than any truly human needs; witness, for instance, the eagerness to protect Kuwaitis under Iraqi occupation in 1991 and the utter lack of enthusiasm to prevent killings in Rwanda in 1997. The International Criminal Court, however,

The ensuing *states* are political communities that have the sole authority to use force internally through their *governments*, which contain the institutional elements of decision-making. The governance patterns that individual states have developed, i.e., their manner of forming governments, systems of administration, and other institutional arrangements, have varied through history and context. Moreover, the legitimacy of individual states, the least amount of public support that is required to allow groups in power to continue to govern without resorting to continual violence, has shifted over time depending on public expectations and the actions of rulers.

But as the scale of human interaction becomes more global, it seems inevitable that political affinities and problems will also cross boundaries more easily. Zygmunt Bauman (2004) and Seyla Benhabib (2005), for instance, have drawn attention to the novel political and philosophical questions associated with growing numbers of refugees, people who are literally stripped of statehood because the governments responsible for their welfare have abandoned them to violence, poverty or natural disasters, and are therefore urgently the concern of all of humanity. Indeed, many refugees are a few generations into enduring their inhumane condition. Thomas Pogge (2001) reminds us also that there are ethical linkages between members of more privileged societies and disadvantaged people elsewhere that go well beyond questions of sympathy. For instance, both historically and through the contemporary global economy, "massive grievous wrongs" have been perpetuated on the weak (Pogge, 2001, p. 11), which demand some type of recompense. Where individuals are being mistreated by rogue elements that are not properly under the purview of domestic justice, one could justify new ways to seek remedy. Finally, there are mounting environmental and health problems whose resolution requires, at minimum, international coordination of policies and programs, but perhaps calls for actions that go beyond such strategies, through the creation of global institutions of legitimate authority.

While the conventional picture of distinct societies, cultures, and publics having (relatively) self-contained ethical obligations is increasingly hard to defend, it is also difficult to imagine that people in power within existing states will simply suspend their entrenched ideas of sovereignty and allow the establishment of new global organizations and institutions. Indeed, as Nancy Fraser has remarked, the Westphalian frame of nation-states "is a powerful instrument of injustice, which gerrymanders political space at the expense of the poor and despised" (Fraser, 2005, pg. 78). Nevertheless, in the spirit of the other essays in this volume, I will suspend disbelief—if only briefly, in Section 4—to write a story of a post-sovereignty moment, based on the optimism that the very exploration of that vision will give us both hope and hints on the pathways for realizing such a world.

Recapturing the History of Politics and Institutions

What do we know about politics and institutions in our past that might give us some clues about their potential in the future? Interestingly, our history across cultures has produced only a small number of archetypes to address the "I-we" problem. Indeed, Plato's simple typology in Volume I of the *Republic* of tyrannies, aristocracies, and

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represents one of the most significant new institutional challenges to Security Council autocracy at the global level, even though the present US administration stubbornly ignores its mandate.

democracies may well exhaust the pure forms of government we have seen throughout history (Plato, 1997). In a tyranny, a single individual claims absolute sovereignty, i.e., her/his interests override that of any other claims made on behalf of the "we". In an aristocracy, elites tend to usurp the role of the "we" by claiming sovereignty on the sole basis of their birthright and/or wealth. It is only in a democracy where not only is the "we" expanded, but the concept of sovereignty itself is embedded in a larger idea of the "people".[*]

Perhaps the most common form of the state for much of the world's history has been the monarchy, which would be a tyranny except when the king claims to carry out actions on behalf of the "we". He does so of course by asserting that he is the sole "I" who could represent the collective. In the infamous monarchies of Europe during the medieval period, politics was largely a problem of resolving family quarrels, albeit often violently, about who should wear the crown. The kings—and few queens—who then ruled, ruled often with the perpetual fear of (literally) being beheaded. Perhaps as a consequence, monarchs paradoxically tried to gain both the respect and fear of as many people as possible, by attempting to create larger-than-life images of themselves for their subjects and courtiers. The early Christian doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, which claimed that the monarch was placed in power to carry out God's earthly duty, was maintained all over Europe for more than a thousand years, even though it did not seem to prevent regicide for a large number of rulers and princes. In an earlier period, Pharaohs in the Old Kingdom of Egypt had managed to take this strategy to an even bolder level, by claiming that they were themselves divine entities.

In Asia, varieties of these approaches were attempted for some two-three millennia, to differing degrees of success. When monarchies were thriving, they remained so most often because the ruler paid close attention to the needs of his subjects. In the *Arthashastra* or *Science of Politics,* written in India in the fourth century BCE, Kautalya exhorts the king to attend to duties to benefit and protect his citizens, especially peasants, who are deemed to be the very foundation of the state (Kautalya, 1992). Even earlier, in China in the sixth century BCE, Confucius had placed great responsibility on the ruler to behave with self-discipline and to govern by example (Confucius, 1999). Indeed, whether required to do so by God or simply for practical reasons of self-preservation, the notion that the monarch has binding duties to subjects has been a constant theme in politics.

Starting in the seventeenth century, the Glorious Revolution in England triggered a series of transformations that substantially circumscribed the powers of the monarch. These new constitutional monarchies with Parliaments establishing new laws protecting larger numbers of people were the new aristocracies, but they were also swamped very quickly by wider demands for popular participation in the form of democracy. These demands were most explicitly articulated first in the American colonies and in France, but spread through Europe, and were later expressed as anti-colonial struggles in many parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. But several nominal democracies today, it might be argued, are really oligarchies—a type of aristocracy in which small elite groups retain power, though often behind the scenes.

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[*] One sees similar patterns even in so-called indigenous societies, which have had a mix of political systems, ranging from hereditary and highly militarized chiefdoms that resemble monarchies to consensus-based institutions that are more democratic in character.

The modern version of the monarchy is the authoritarian regime. Its approach to solving the "I-we" problem differs, however, depending on whether it is fascist or despotic. A fascist regime is a populist one in which large numbers of people define the "we" in relation to a "them," who they undertake collectively to expel, attack, or annihilate. The majority typically identifies with an individual leader and party that effectively consolidate power, but remain popular. Despotic regimes, on the other hand, are not popular but are governed by fear of the leaders, who control the military that they could effectively unleash on the population. Even despots, however, are at least partially subject to the constraint of effectiveness, to the extent that they wish to sustain their power, and many strive towards a semblance of legitimacy.

As an institutional type, democracy has made spotty appearances throughout history. In a few Greek city states some 2,500 years ago, in Rome shortly thereafter, in some indigenous societies in the Americas during the early part of the second millennium, and in the late fourteenth century preceding the Italian Renaissance and spreading slowly to other countries from cities in Northern Italy, the notion of popular sovereignty gained prominence, shifting the burden of ruling and staying in power away from one or a few individuals to "the people" themselves. In these original democracies, differences among the various "I"s required a new form of collectively managed reconciliation.

Four aspects of democracy have endowed it with legitimacy:

1) it maintains transparent processes and allows access for some form of participation by citizens;

2) in so doing it reflects broadly the "popular will" with regard to substantive issues of collective interest;

3) it provides opportunities for citizens to learn to trust one another's motives even if they do not fully agree with their positions; and

4) it generally makes possible the non-violent transition of authority through institutions of power-sharing such as elections.

Democracy, in its broadest sense, thus offers the true promise of legitimacy because it takes to heart the notion that the various "I"s have equal status when they constitute the "we" as a *political community*. But while it is a good rhetorical device to suggest that the "I"s collectively constitute the "we", it is by no means easy to operationalize this concept, that is, to actually grant equal political power to everyone. In contemporary political formations, representative democracies have tried to solve the problem by defining a process for conferring power and duty to specific organizations: the legislature and executive, with the judiciary acting as the counterbalance for recourse against infractions by the former. A "civil society" also began to emerge in this context as an independent watchdog and, in theory at least, led to a provisional balance of power among different entities and also maintained the legitimacy of the state. But as important as these institutions are, they do not entirely reduce the demand for direct participation in the way

policy is rendered and resources managed, especially during periods of discord over these issues.

Perhaps because democracy is such an intuitively appealing notion, one sees many forms of it that have evolved along multiple trajectories in different parts of the world, largely reflecting local histories and prevailing cultural conditions. While it might be tempting to adopt a triumphalist view of a single overarching model of democracy spreading across the world, the claim to being democratic comes these days from across a range of political systems, including those that are socialist, single-party or military-led parliamentary, multi-party presidential, and consensus-based tribal. Nor should we necessarily dismiss these claims simply on the grounds that the people are not really sovereign in these expressions; after all, the same may be said of dominant forms of representative government in the United States and Europe, which are themselves frequently accused of resembling oligarchies. Indeed, even the celebrated democracies of Athens were hardly enviable in their exclusion of women and slaves.

In all political formations, including democracies, there is a persistent governance (i.e., administrative) problem: ruling effectively means having to gather sufficient resources (often in the form of taxes) to serve all people without causing them to be dissatisfied enough to turn against the prevailing group or sovereign in power. Only in ancient Egypt do we see a sustained solution to this problem, with the "god" ideology combined with exceptionally successful administrative systems that provided water and other infrastructure services to everyone for several centuries (cf. North, 1981). Elsewhere, monarchs tried to stay in power primarily by capturing rents from neighboring or far-off places to make their own subjects feel secure while using foreigners as slaves and otherwise oppressing people in other countries.

In democracies, this administrative problem often takes the form of a fiscal crisis: in order to protect social welfare, the government tends to maintain many unprofitable enterprises that cannot survive in a market economy (e.g., education, health care, social security). Yet, this entails collecting sufficient tax revenues, which may be resisted by individual voters either because they perceive others as free-riding or would like to free-ride themselves (Offe and Keane, 1984). One of the key challenges of politics in democracies is to remain legitimate as well as effective; minimally, for governments to maintain their ability to be trusted and to collect sufficient taxes for providing various demanded and necessary services. A further complicating factor is that the so-called "people" rarely speak with one voice, but are fragmented into parties, interest groups, and lobbies, which sometimes behave strategically to embarrass or eventually pull down the executive and alter the composition of the legislature. The prevalent assumption in many contemporary political formations is that all this is healthy in terms of keeping the polity on its toes. Often, however, this does not in fact turn out to be the case. Rather, it is democracies that are most likely to become corrupt oligarchies wherein a small elite group maintains the pretence of legitimacy (by "entering politics" through elections and its campaign support system) but actually controls and manages resources largely to meet its own interests.

Historically, a further aspect of democracy has helped maintain its legitimacy, namely, that the political community could typically be defined in terms of a bounded territory that also often contained a particular linguistic or ethnic group. To the extent that the "we" could be circumscribed to include a set of identities that were recognizable to its

members, democratic institutions have been legitimized on the basis that they distribute political power among groups who could be trusted in terms of their cultural affinities to a specific *people* or even *nation*. In the next section, I explore why the nation in particular is a constructed identity that has arisen as a contingent rather than necessary outcome of history. Later I will explore the possibility of creating such a sense of the "we" at the global level.

Politics from Below and Above: the Imagined Community

An extraordinary phenomenon has emerged during the past two centuries or so. Just around the turn of the nineteenth century, a strong new wave of belief began to sweep through vast regions of Europe and North America, and then elsewhere, that the territorially and often ethnically similar community that was consolidated into a politically governed state was also a *nation* and, indeed, a fundamental unit of social life. Prior to that, people had their closest affinities with their local community or religion and not, barring few exceptions, with the contingent territorial boundaries constituting the state they happened to live in. But by the nineteenth century, the most powerful states of Europe and the emerging states in the Americas were also hotbeds of nationalist pride.

These feelings of *nationalism* did not arise in a vacuum but were in many cases cultivated by intellectuals and local leaders who historicized the nation as an "imagined community" that was larger than the local tribe and proximate groups.[*] In some cases, this collective cultural identity was crafted with the direct purpose of separating new territorially-bound "we-communities" from larger empires or from deposing colonial masters or defeating invading armies, both of which helped motivate people to think positively about the nation in vast and disparate regions (Anderson, 1991; Chatterjee, 1993). In others, it was a means to form a new identity by unifying a divided or fragmented territory. But in all cases the nation was newly visualized in terms of a coherent history and a plausible future; as Bernard Yack writes:

> National community, I suggest, is an image of community *over time*. What binds us into national communities is our image of a shared heritage that is passed, in modified form, from one generation to another. National communities, as a result, are imagined as starting from some specific point of origin in the past and extend forward into an indefinite future. (Yack, 2001)

In fact it is reasonable to believe that nationalism became pronounced in the nineteenth century primarily because of the proliferation of the print media—especially the historical novel—which helped unite dominant groups who shared the same language even as they became more literate. With more people reading newspapers, books, pamphlets and so on, which were increasingly widely available since the spread of the printing press, it became possible for the first time to develop a broader cultural attachment beyond the local community (Anderson, 1991). At the same time, differences

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[*] "All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson, 1991).

in language solidified, breaking down old dialects, and excluding those from completely different language groups.

While print media played a significant role in initially popularizing the idea of the nation as a shared community, radio and TV later *sustained* it even in places with low levels of literacy, and eventually an entire body of international law was invoked to *protect* it (albeit unevenly) as a sovereign entity. The older principle of state sovereignty (involving either the monarch or popular representation) dovetailed quite well with the ideology of nationalism, notwithstanding the systematic violation of the spirit of Westphalia in non-European parts of the world in the form of the nineteenth century imperial expansion. In fact, it is the very power of this dual ideology (that the occupied regions constituted *nations* that had the right to be *sovereign*) that we discern in the successes of many anti-colonial movements of the last century.

Today, the very idea of a "national character" as an intrinsically distinctive attribute of any given nation has become powerfully imprinted in our social imagination. In its everyday or banal forms, especially in well-established nation-states, nationalism simply entails the constant reminder of one's allegiance to one's "own" nation. Michael Billig suggests that people are "reminded of their national place in a world of nations" in all sorts of ways, but this is not consciously registered as such (Billig, 1995, p. 8). Thus, nationalist ideology is reproduced, like any other form of cultural or economic capital, and remains a powerful motivating force that can call upon citizens to make significant and often tragic sacrifices on behalf of their country.

The cultural reproduction of nationalism can result in habits and routines that are almost imperceptible to citizens. Thus, it seems "natural" that an inhabitant of Mizoram in northeastern India, flanked by Bangladesh and Myanmar, and sharing no linguistic ties with Kerala in the southwest, need not have to travel two thousand miles to think explicitly of Keralites as her compatriots and to share an emotional bond with them. And it seems perfectly reasonable for her to feel indifferent towards a person in Africa, China, or even Bangladesh. After the attacks in New York and Washington in September 2001, Americans from every corner of the country felt numbed with sadness and anger, even though only a tiny fraction would have had any direct connection with the victims. Yet, as several commentators have pointed out, many Americans have been numbingly indifferent to atrocities elsewhere (albeit not televised with the same drama as the World Trade Center attacks), even when their own government has been responsible for them. It appears that the formation of a strong "we" identity at the level of the nation or country is characterized by two interlocked feelings: a strong connection with compatriots and general indifference, if not antipathy, towards others.

Banal nationalism, in Michael Bellig's characterization, is not in fact benign; it lulls us into a false sense of security by causing us to mistake a contingent, historically generated set of institutions, making up the territorially-bound nation state, to represent some general law of social organization. Moreover, as Roberto Unger (1987) has pointed out, as we get trapped as a society into such routines of "false necessity" we tend to put artificial limits on our own freedom of imagination. From this standpoint, it should not be too surprising that, even in a rapidly globalizing world, all the major theorists of democracy take as a given that democratic practice can only be meaningful within the confines of a nation-state.

Three challenges to this conventional way of thinking have recently come into view and are beginning to shake the very conceptual foundations of democratic theories of territorially-bound entities. The *first* is what might be termed the "Dogville" effect,[*] where erstwhile homogeneous and established nation-states are confronted with new actors with differing cultural histories and political expectations entering their social and political space. The *second* challenge has to do with determining the legal and political status of growing numbers of stateless people along with others seeking to enter the borders of wealthier states. The *third* relates to ensuring the fair and reasonable participation of all in addressing trans-boundary concerns such as SARS, climate change, war, financial instability, and deepening global poverty.

Democracy in Dogville

The first major challenge to democratic theory vis-à-vis the nation-state has emerged mainly within the metropolitan centers of Europe and North America in the form of increasing demands from 'multicultural' groups identifying themselves as such and as having specific needs. New claims emerge, relating to respect for distinct traditions, and cultural histories start to gain prominence, in the form, say, of Muslims seeking to take time off from work for their daily prayers, gays and lesbians seeking legal recognition for unions, and new immigrants seeking bilingual assistance for education and access to social services and jobs. As evidenced by the vast writing industry that continues to be sustained by this topic, political philosophy appears by and large to have found the resources within its own traditions to face the challenge, whose remaining intricacies now relate to institutionalizing recognition, or respect, across evermore diverse groups while serving the legitimate interests of individuals rather than of groups per se (e.g., Kymlicka, 1989; Kukathas, 1993; Fraser and Olson, 1999).

Yet, there is a continual tension in these arrangements, with a constant demand that the newcomers "integrate" into the cultural space of the host nation, along with the anxiety that its "core values" may somehow be lost if differences among various groups were somehow officially sanctioned (Thompson, 1999; Huntington, 2004). Furthermore, even if the ethical arguments in favor of multiculturalism were to trounce their opponents on philosophical grounds, there remains an uneasy political situation within nation-states with respect to the "other" or "outsider", as nationalist sentiments become increasingly inseparable from xenophobic ones.

The nation-state against stateless people

While multiculturalism has itself only lately gotten on the policy agenda of nation-states, people at their borders have yet had little chance of having any political voice of significance. But this is not to say that the ethical and political problem of having to respond to stateless people can be wished away. According to the United Nations (UNHCR, 2006), there were more than nineteen million stateless people in 2004 (characterized as refugees, asylum seekers, and "others of concern"). In the course of this century, it is expected that up to 300 million people living on small islands and coastal areas could be severely affected by sea-level rise associated with climate change, and

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[*] This refers to the 2003 film by Lars von Trier with the same title, an allegory expressing the anxiety felt by a self-contained community when having to deal with the presence of a foreigner in its midst.

many of them could be looking for new homes outside their countries (Nicholls, 2004). Nationalist sentiment, especially in well-established countries, is generally antagonist towards the idea of providing economic, political, and environmental refugees entry and citizenship rights. Meanwhile, international institutions are built to meet the specifications of nation-states rather than individuals and groups, and can only provide relief services for them, not political opportunities for self-fulfillment. Indeed, refugees are the "epitome of extraterritoriality" with no "empty spaces" to move into: they are redundant because our planet has become full in a political rather than demographic sense (Bauman, 2004).

Addressing global injustice

It is not uncommon to assume that problems of poverty, environmental degradation, and violations of human rights outside one's own country are also beyond one's moral responsibility. For instance, there is a tendency to argue that so-called "burdened" societies are backward because of intrinsic or historical domestic reasons and that the responsibility for addressing these ought to lie with the leadership of these societies. But it is increasingly clear that such a view is untenable; one's private actions are not immune from global consequence, global problems have local impacts, and burdened societies are not entirely responsible for their own conditions. As Thomas Pogge has pointed out,

> We are not bystanders who find ourselves confronted with foreign deprivations whose origins are wholly unconnected to ourselves.… First, their social starting positions and ours have emerged from a single historical process that was pervaded by massive grievous wrongs.… Second, they and we depend on a single natural resource base, from the benefits of which they are largely, and without compensation, excluded.… Third, they and we coexist within a single global economic order that has a strong tendency to perpetuate and even aggravate global inequality. (Pogge, 2001, p. 11)

One way to interpret Pogge's remarks is that the ethical response to global injustice is for the powerful countries of the world, starting with the United States, to increase their international aid disbursements, stop engaging in aggressive actions around the world, and agree to certain key institutional adjustments at the world scale, like broadening membership of the Security Council, responding properly to World Court recommendations, and so on.

In light of the other two challenges outlined above, however, there is more radical way to read Pogge, which is that the nation-state can no longer be seen as the *decisive* site from which to conduct democratic discourse on many of humanity's ethical as well as political claims. Others have come to similar conclusions. David Held and Anthony McGrew (2001), for instance, use the term "overlapping communities of fate" to express this condition:

> In nearly all major areas of public policy, the enmeshment of national political communities in regional and global processes involves them in intensive issues of trans-boundary co-ordination and regulation. Political space for the development and

pursuit of effective government and the accountability of political power is no longer coterminous with a delimited national territory. The growth of trans-boundary problems creates "overlapping communities of fate"; that is, a state of affairs in which the fortune and prospects of individual political communities are increasingly bound together.

Can globalism replace nationalism?

The forgoing discussion provides us some indication that, as an ideology, nationalism may be increasingly untenable within a globalizing world, and as an organizing framework for world politics, the Westphalian nation-state has already run into serious trouble—witness the mounting disorientation with regard to the growing power of "rogue" states, "failed" states, and stateless actors from multinational corporations to terrorists. Should this crisis in global politics give us hope for the birth of a new type of "imagined community", one which has all of humanity as its point of reference?

Indeed, if all communities are imagined, there is no reason why a "global community" cannot emerge as a potent political idea that usurps nationalism. But as Zygmunt Bauman says, for imagination to turn into a "tangible, potent, effective integrating force," it needs to be "aided by socially produced and socially sustained institutions of collective self-identification and self-government, as it was in the case of modern nations wedded for better or worse and till death-do-them-part to modern sovereign states" (Bauman, 2002). To be sure, such institutions are absent today, but that simply provides the impetus to a number of political theorists to imagine them differently.

For instance, David Held describes a framework where states do not disappear, but where four principles prevail: a) the ultimate units of moral concern are individual people—egalitarian individualism; b) everyone has equal moral status—reciprocal recognition; c) forms of decision making are non-coercive and consensual; d) there is equal opportunity for all public decision-making that is best located when it "is closest to, and involves, those whose opportunities and life chances are determined by significant social processes and forces"—subsidiarity (Held, 2003). Held recognizes that the gap between aspiration and the real structure of institutional forms is inconveniently large, which is why he proposes a formulation in which deliberative and decision-making centers operate around function and allow for direct involvement of individuals in different levels and types of public spheres. However, such involvement will be through state/regional representatives for strategic direction (regional parliaments and/or referenda across nation-states for tough problems); in short, a multilayered institutional structure with networks of democratic forums from the local to the global and the use of diverse mechanisms to access public preferences. Falk and Strauss (2001) have proposed an even more concrete idea, which is to develop a global parliament composed largely of elected civil society representatives, and which operates in parallel with other organizations at national and international level and slowly gains legitimacy and power.

In general, these transnational approaches to democracy fall under the rubric of what Daniele Archibugi terms "cosmopolitical" democratic theory (Archibugi, 2003). Although characterized by an assortment of moral, institutional, and political positions, it typically invokes a universalist ideal as the ethical underpinning for its proposals, which in turn entails the provision of legal and political means globally for people to assert and exercise influence over their lives. Cosmopolitical democracy does not call for states to

be dissolved, but it does require the creation of global democratic institutions that would in effect weaken state power, with some framework to foster administration and justice at the global level and create new ways to broaden public participation at all levels. It is broadly committed to the freedom of individual persons and pluralism in institutional arrangements that operate under the principle of subsidiarity. Archibugi, Held, and their fellow travelers take the discussion of cosmopolitan liberalism further than others before them have in that they are firmly committed to the idea of a transnational politics: "global democracy is not just the achievement of democracy within each state" (Archibugi, 2004, p. 439).

As Raskin (2006) has argued, such a politics could be legitimized through what has been termed constrained pluralism, in which institutional change is guided by three complementary principles: irreducibility, subsidiarity, and heterogeneity. Irreducibility acknowledges the need for adjudicating certain issues at the global level; subsidiarity limits the scope of such authority to only those issues that truly require global governance, with others regulated at appropriate levels; and heterogeneity allows for existence of diverse patterns of local and regional institutions and modes of development, limited only by global obligations as well as broadly accepted principles of democracy, respect for human rights, and the environment.

The next section presents a narrative of an imagined global political community operating on these principles, mainly with a view to enlarging the discussion on rethinking the political project beyond the nation-state through an act of creative story-building.* The idea of this thought-experiment is to envision democratic arrangements at the global level that could foster a constrained pluralism that does not undermine local and eco-regional political formations with diverse histories and characteristics. The point, however, is not to *design* precisely the institutional structure of global politics, but to highlight some of its features by visualizing a plausible, legitimate, and desirable global political community.

An Imagined Global Political Community

In the late twenty-first century, a vast global transformation has taken place. The age of tyrannical regimes, violent conflict among states, and the dominance of "great powers" is no more. Politics as an activity remains, as it was understood in classical times, the graceful art of negotiating the inevitable differences between "I"s and the "we" to accomplish both proximate and long-term ends. But the units and purposes of political organization have been transformed fundamentally.

The "nation-state" is changed beyond recognition. It is now archaic to speak of "territorial integrity" as a geopolitical principle and of "nationalism" as an ideology. Instead, where they do exist, nation-states operate as an intermediate level within a multiplicity of political communities from the local to the global level:

- *Local communities*, to a large extent, nourish grassroots democracy through face-to-face interaction. In size, they range from small townships to mega-cities and, in some cases, rural provinces that coincide with natural eco-regions (for example, river basins or drylands or mountains). The "we-communities" to which the

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* See Raskin (2006) for an overview of the global vision, including economic, cultural, and social aspects.

corresponding polities cater tend to be organized around clusters of townships, cosmopolitan urban regions, and particular cultural and linguistic groups, including indigenous communities, who have long served as ecological stewards for their regions.

- At the meso-scale, *regional political communities* of various forms have emerged, only some of which are the remnants of today's nation-states, especially those whose historical borders coincide with natural boundaries or have relatively homogenous cultural affinities. A few have disappeared entirely, the political lives of their erstwhile citizens now operating at trans-regional levels and at the local level, with some participating to a greater degree at the global level. Some others now operate primarily as administrative entities at a semi-continental scale. By and large, "countries" are as quaint today as "kingdoms" were in much of the twentieth century, primarily because far freer levels of migration and novel forms of telecommunication allow unprecedented levels of access and participation in communities of different forms and at different scales. None operate as "states" in their historical sense of having "monopoly over legitimate violence." Those erstwhile countries that do survive see their purpose and mandate as being intimately connected to the long-term security of biomes and communities within the global context of the biosphere and the human race, not the expansion of state power at the expense of the welfare of other parts of the world. Thus, none of them have standing armies, and there is little question of breaking out into war with each other.

- The new *regional* political communities, including erstwhile nation-states, operate primarily to meet the administrative demands of meso-scale concerns. Some are political entities only in a loose administrative sense; in fact, they inspire a relatively weak sense of "we"-ness within the hierarchy of entities from the local to the global level. While all are separately served by democratic institutional arrangements for handling concerns that rise up from the local level, or are referred downward from the global level, they do not engage with each other or their constituents as sovereign *states,* but rather as members of a global federation with mutual responsibilities and limited discretionary powers. The conflicts that do take place among them relate primarily to matters of jurisdictional uncertainty, which global arbitration proceedings and courts are typically called to resolve. Internally, most are governed by some sort of regional council, a democratically elected entity that tries to meet functional demands at the meso-scale, e.g., energy services, communications, finance and industrial development.

- Other trans-regional political communities are becoming increasingly significant, and are often not defined by contiguous territorial boundaries. These forms of "disaggregated sovereignty" appear to have reached a more advanced stage of institutional development than in the early twenty-first century. These include *Biome Stewardship Councils (BSC)*, which derive their strength from the growing realization that forms of life associated together in the same area share certain common elements by virtue of belonging to a single habitat and should be governed

accordingly (Rajan, 2006). Others focus on functional collaboration and governance associated with policing activity (e.g., trafficking, money laundering) and for addressing the special concerns of indigenous communities.

- A *global polity* was developed under the framework of the World Constitution, which was drafted in 2032 and unanimously adopted by all the member governments in the World Union (the descendent of the United Nations), acts as the overall trustee for the planet and its inhabitants. It was developed with the technical name, Global Agreement on Integrated Activity, and was subsequently referred to universally by its acronym—GAIA. The institutional arrangements mandated by GAIA are now maintained by three organizations: a directly elected parliament with a rotating executive committee, an administrative branch, and a judiciary. GAIA is responsible for all matters of global concern, primarily human rights, ecosystems, trade, and security. Its main political instrument is the global parliament, which is composed of representatives from about 2,500 electoral districts all over the world, and a second chamber with about 300 nominated members. Membership in its political community is formed not as it is today through *inter-national* affiliation but through a combination of local and regional representation and direct participation by civil society organizations, global political parties, and systems of referendum around special issues. GAIA is based on human and social rights and ecological stewardship, and embodies a set of values that promote solidarity, mutual cooperation, respect for nature, and peace. Its main purpose is to create standards and guidelines of common interest. There is much of common interest at the global scale: climate protection, water resource management, biodiversity protection, sustainable food production, trade, human rights, space exploration, cultural and scientific activities, and more. In many ways, the new institutions are a strong revitalization of the original purpose of the United Nations, affirming global service and belonging to "*we, the people*" and not "*we, the states of the world*". It also has the only significant security force in the world, whose main purpose is to deter tyrannical powers, despotic regimes, and similar breakdowns in political orders that threaten global peace, human rights, or the environment.

The recently enacted Global Peace Treaty has some resemblance to the European Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, except that it extends to the whole world, and there is no planetary military force that exists to threaten humanity. In fact it goes much further, since all major weapons systems have been destroyed, all research into weapons design and manufacturing has long been abandoned, and the vast military-industrial complex is a relic of history.[*] Even the entertainment industry no longer glamorizes war, weaponry, or large-scale conflict; the prevailing cultural paradigm is to be mildly disgusted by antiquated blockbuster war films and toys and games that glorify violence.

The very framework of sovereignty has acquired a completely different meaning as a result of the strong institutions of subsidiarity, democracy, and freedom of movement across the globe. With rotating leadership especially in many regional communities and at the global level, political power has itself become substantially diffuse, minimizing the

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[*] Immanuel Kant's essay on "Perpetual Peace" has provided a good starting point for this charter, but with the peace established not among "states" but among regional councils and local communities.

possibility that breakaway factions will even be able to exercise sustained territorial control, except in a tyrannical and therefore politically illegitimate way. Where despotic regimes of this sort begin to emerge, public appeals for rescue towards the restoration of democracy can proceed at multiple levels: the regional councils and the World Parliament, as well as various arbitration and mediation mechanisms. Where force is required, GAIA authorizes its use as a last resort, again with specific restraints to prevent over-reaction.

Local communities and provinces have adequate voice in GAIA, and advanced communications technologies ensure that the decision-making processes of the World Parliament remain attentive to local concerns, even as they fulfill the interests of the entire planet. A proportionate election system with rotating terms has ensured that the members in the Parliament do in fact fairly represent the interests of all groups and of humanity at large, and the network of institutions remains sufficiently agile to respond to corruption and political rent-seeking. The elected Members of Parliament are obliged, according to GAIA, to also act as trustees of future generations whose interests have never before been given any strong voice in democratic systems. This representation of humanity's rich diversity is further strengthened by advisory councils both of indigenous peoples and the world's religions, allowing the cultural and spiritual heritage of humanity to inform global governance. At the same time a World Science Council provides advice based on the latest scientific knowledge. This Council also channels research funding to the best science teams around the world for research that concerns the functioning of the Earth system and builds scientific capacity where needed. Revenue collection (taxation) is done locally and regionally, with a portion of proceeds going to GAIA for long-range planning, determining and allocating sub-regional transfers, and contingencies. Global standards for labor, environment, and trade are determined by a small number of administrative and quasi-judiciary bodies; these bodies are also needed to set strategic direction and meet operational needs: finance, energy, water, transport, environment, forests, and so on. These act in consultation with local bodies, and again, with the help of contemporary communications media, permit input from, and involvement by, individuals from all over the world.

Political communities are thus formed at multiple levels: locally in some areas of the world primarily to meet the complex needs of urbanized areas; regionally to service meso-scale needs of energy and industry, among others; trans-regionally, around specialized concerns like the protection of biomes and the prevention of crime; and globally around issues of worldwide concern, including human security and the environment. They correspond to the compound affinities, identities, and types of citizenship that people form at all these different scales. People's affiliations vary based on needs and interests around these broad groupings, among others, a reflection of what William James (1990) has called the "fluctuating material" of our identities.

The principle of subsidiarity, which was first applied in the European Union (now replaced with smaller regional councils and having a completely different character with the virtual disappearance of its member "states"), is now used as a successful tool to provide a "conceptual alternative to the comparatively empty and unhelpful idea of state sovereignty", which had remained a bone of contention in the original EU (Carozza, 2003, p. 40). Each governance level is seen to have a crucial and unique role but remains

supportive of the others.[*] For issues where it is either difficult for local stakeholders to be cognizant of the global impacts of their actions or where their interests are likely turn parochial and thereby work to harm human and ecological welfare, regional or global polities play a significant role. Correspondingly, there are several concerns that can only be grasped and properly addressed at the local level but require freedom from bureaucratic meddling by remote powers; these are properly adjudicated at sites proximate to these issues, albeit in a manner that is not blind to their impacts in the outside world. The balance is effected institutionally at all levels through the presence of ombudsmen, outside observers, and judicial means of recourse across levels.

This multilayered system of governance thus involves a nested hierarchy of mutually supportive policies and institutions initiated at all levels (Karlsson, 2000). The nested relationship to democratically engaged decision-making at larger scales functions from hamlets, townships, and cities of various sizes and forms, through eco-regions and other regional organizations, to global ones, all of which remain significant sites of political activity in their own right. Both local communities as well as their larger-scale agglomerations have certain basic institutions in common: a judiciary with access to appeal, powers of enforcement by an executive and administrative organization, and an open and participatory access to decision-making. These act as checks on corruption and excessive political control by small elite networks. At local and even regional levels, each community may adopt its own form of participatory democracy: in some instances, the Greek model of representatives selected by "lot" is preferred; in others, a multi-party representative form with public financing of campaigns and term limits seems most appropriate; in still others, a "functional" form of government is chosen, with emphasis on skilled civil servants in specific roles selected through open and competitive examinations. Whatever design is adopted, and at all levels, there is full transparency in accounting and decision-making procedures, an ombudsman's office for dispute resolution, and full recourse to the judiciary in cases of serious conflict.

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[*] Thus, the actions of the World Parliament are limited only to those that were better performed in common than by BSCs and sub-continental powers; the same is true for the latter in relation to local governments.

Regions in a Great Transition World*

The fabric of planetary society is woven with hundreds of regions which are astonishingly diverse in character and size. Some correspond to the national boundaries of a century ago and others are federations of earlier states. Still others are parts of former states, forging a common identity around the boundaries of river basins and other ecosystems (so-called "bio-regions"), urban centers, and cultural traditions. Nevertheless, most regions can be clustered crudely into one of three major types, called *Agoria*, *Ecodemia*, and *Arcadia*, although few regions are pure cases.

Agoria

These regions would be most recognizable to a visitor from the year 2000. Some critics call *Agoria* "Sweden Supreme", with its more conventional consumer patterns, lifestyles, and institutions. Its economies are dominated by large shareholder corporations. However, when compared to even the most outstanding examples of social democratic models of the last century, the commitment to social equality, the environment, and democratic engagement from the level of the firm to the globe is of a different order. The key is a vast array of policies and regulations, supported by popular values, that align corporate behavior with social goals, stimulate sustainable technology, and moderate material consumption in order to maintain highly equitable, responsible, and environmental societies.

Ecodemia

The distinguishing feature of *Ecodemia* is its fundamental departure from the capitalist economic system. The new system, often referred to as "economic democracy", banishes the capitalist from two key arenas of economic life. First, the model of the firm as comprised of private owners and hired workers has been replaced by worker ownership in large-scale enterprises, complemented by non-profits and highly regulated small businesses. Second, private capitalist markets have given way to socialized investment processes. Worker ownership and workplace democracy has reduced the expansionary tendency of the traditional capitalist firm. Instead the focus is on profit per worker (rather than absolute profit) and the popular goal of "time affluence", which shortens work weeks. Publicly-controlled regional and community investment banks, supported by participatory regulatory processes, re-cycle social savings and tax-generated capital funds. Their mandate is to ensure that successful applications from capital-seeking entrepreneurs satisfy social and environmental criteria, as well as traditional financial criteria.

Arcadia

Relative to other regions, the bias in *Arcadia* is toward self-reliant economies, small enterprises, face-to-face democracy (at least in cyberspace), community engagement, and love of nature. Lifestyles tend to emphasize material sufficiency, folk crafts, and reverence for tradition. While the local is emphasized, most people are highly connected with cosmopolitan culture and world affairs through advanced communication technology and transportation systems. *Arcadia* has centers of innovation in some technologies (organic agriculture, modular solar devices, human-scale transport devices, etc.) and arts (new music, craft products, etc.). Exports of these products and services, along with eco-tourism, supports the modest trade requirements of these relatively time-rich and slow-moving societies.

This discussion of differences should be balanced by a reminder that the regions also have much in common. Relative to the nations of a century ago, contemporary regions enjoy a high degree of political participation, healthy environments, universal education and healthcare, high social cohesion, no absolute poverty, and more fulfilling lives. Finally, people the world over share the historically novel attribute of citizenship in a world community.

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* Summarized from Raskin (2006).

Political life within the archetypes

Three archetypal communities exist in a *Great Transition* world (Raskin, 2006). They are notional forms representing distinct world-views; rather than tied to real places, they are useful primarily as idealizations to provide us a heuristic understanding of how constrained pluralism might work in practice. What all three archetypes have in common are the bold visions and ethical commitments of the *Great Transition*; indeed, the goals of sustainability, peace, and global justice remain paramount in their actions and engagements with each other.

In terms of political life, the most vibrant forms of participatory democracy at the local level can be seen in *Arcadian* communities, but are by no means exclusive to them. Thus, in *Arcadia*, the local is where people spend most of their energy, and the most important site of political conflict and its resolution is the community hall, where face-to-face political debates (or its closest proxies through advanced telecommunications technologies) are arbitrated by elected officials. But Arcadians also participate in regional and global forums through their participation in civil society as well as political organizations. Similarly, *Ecodemians* and *Agorians* may be most interested in the regional or global level, but are equally active in the local politics of their schools, communities, and workplaces. *Arcadian* and *Ecodemian* institutions of democracy may tend to be more participatory than those in *Agoria*, which tend to favor representation, but all conform to the same types of global and eco-regional institutions. In all three archetypes, political activity is based on personal choice, dependent more on one's interest and convenience, than on access to forums of decision-making.

In *Arcadia* and *Ecodemia*, in particular, advancements in communications technology encourage associations to be made across the globe that approximate face-to-face interaction. Choosing whether or not to be active in local, regional, and global political forums is almost as easy as a parent determining whether or not s/he should join a local parent-teacher association, or a condominium resident wondering about the value of joining the building association. *Agorian* communities are less enamored of direct forms of participation, but even they are inspired by regional and global civil society organizations, which facilitate their political engagement at larger scales.

The figure below tries to capture how the different domains of political activity are most likely to be organized among the three archetypes.
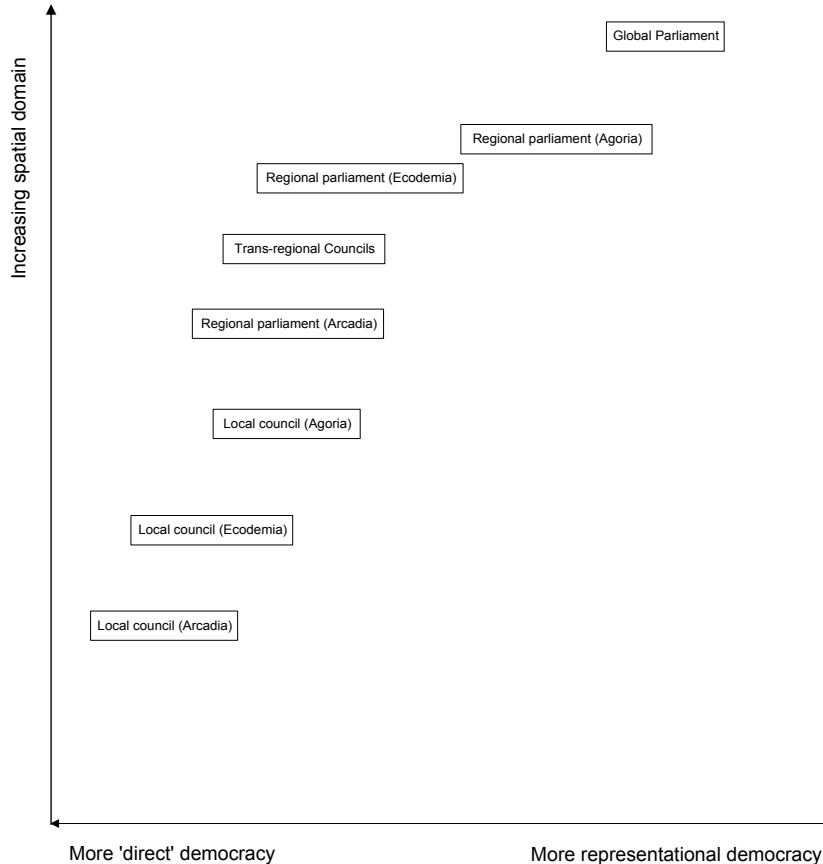
Since a *Great Transition* in other spheres of human activity is also in motion, disparities in wealth are nowhere as stark as they used to be, and private rent-seeking activities are considerably constrained, both of which severely restrict the opportunities for vested interests to have a dominant influence on governments and lawmaking. Where such capture does take place, its effects are relatively muted, because of the supplementary political associations that the great majority can form at multiple levels. The elite social networks that characterize corrupt regimes are often rendered irrelevant and destabilized almost as soon as they are formed.

The political economies of production and consumption are just, and allow for people to have more free time, more time to engage in democracy building and caring for others, and a better quality of life. Inter-regional travel and migration are now predicated on factors such as personal relations, cultural appeal, and climatic conditions, rather than on the wrenching forces of manipulative employment enticements abroad and oppressive cruelty at home.

The revitalization of communities brings with it a renewed sense of pride and involvement in local activities; yet, contact and engagement with the global public sphere, combined with a well-rounded education system, help foster enduring attachment to the world beyond and allegiance to humanity at large. By definition, a "citizen" is now someone who perceives the broader implications of her actions and feels responsible towards humanity and the natural world. Her rights and responsibilities are at once local, regional, and global: she is free to participate, form associations or work anywhere, and

to seek recourse to justice in any part of the world. While local communities are strong, they are open in the sense of allowing entry, voice, and exit to those who wish to migrate, and the same freedom of movement of people exists across biomes and sub-continental regions. Politics is not as distasteful as it seemed in the distorted democracies and authoritarian regimes of yore, because now there are sound institutional safeguards against "capture" by special interests and powerful entities. But perhaps most importantly, a rich tradition of public reasoning has been instituted, setting in motion a deep and vibrant global democratic culture.

In the initial stages, global inequality was itself a major barrier to this remarkable political change in the world. Asia-Pacific had plenty of human and financial capital, but relatively few natural resources. Europe lacked human capital and natural resources; the Americas were reasonably well-endowed, but Africa was relatively deficient in all three. In all the continents it was also a long route to reducing substantially, if not eradicating, endemic violence; displacement; extreme poverty; ill-health; illiteracy; malnutrition; environmental degradation and resource scarcity; discrimination based on gender, sexuality, race, or religion; and inadequate access to services.

With the introduction of GAIA, the uneven geographical dispersion of endowments was viewed as a reason to provide equal "opportunity" rights to all humans to pursue their capabilities, and appropriate institutional forms were established to manage the stewardship of ecosystems. Consequently, there was just enough migration to allow human development to flourish among those who were most deprived, even as consumption and work hours shifted downward among those who were already well-off, bringing about further enhancements in their own quality of life. Such changes were not exclusive to the economic and political spheres, but were indeed profoundly affected by each other in social and cultural lives of individuals both in the global North and South. But politics did play a significant role even here, for a primary driver of these changes was a slowly evolving global citizens movement, a political revolution whose goal was not to gain power for itself, but to change the world.

The major transformation in political organization and purpose also required enlightened leadership, changed habits and routines initiated by democratic experiments around the world, and a slow but unmistakable shift in values where global solidarity, tolerance, and a reduced materialist focus on human development took precedence to build closer connections among nations, cultures, and religions, and between humans and nature. The early arduous project of promoting environmental and humanist values among intergovernmental and civil society organizations, such as those expressed in the Earth Charter and the International Declaration on Human Rights, was extended to educational and religious cultures, inculcating a new sensibility even within the private sphere. School curricula now explicitly seek to encourage the values of world citizenship, and religious education within all faiths puts increasing emphasis on learning about the unifying elements among them. These have generated positive feedbacks, providing citizens greater incentive to elect local, regional, and global representatives dedicated to service and who embody a general concern for the planet and people.

As in other domains, a *Great Transition* in politics and institutions is underway, but it is not the end of history. Rather, politics as an activity has simply become more appealing to larger numbers of people, even as its sites have mushroomed, and the terms of political discourse have become more broadly democratic. Meanwhile, new tensions continue to

proliferate, mostly among groups developing sectarian tendencies, each spitefully relying on its own version of the history of power while relating to the other. There are also instances of large-scale violence that are caused mainly by an intensification of criminal activity and the fanciful ideas of would-be despots and kooks with followers. But in the absence of superpower politics and the hegemonic states, the options for resolving these battles are far less wrought with factional intrigue than before and the likelihood of large-scale brutality has declined accordingly. Overall, power networks are well-dispersed and rotational, with the prevailing institutions providing far fewer opportunities than before to permit the long-term consolidation of power by those who happen to have access to financial wealth or other forms of elite standing in society.

Pointers of Hope

The main criticism that even a deliberately whimsical piece of writing such as the one outlined above is likely to encounter is that it is naive to expect especially the strong states to cede their sovereignty even partially to higher levels, such as a regional or global authority. Yet, ever since around the time of the Bretton Woods agreement and the UN Charter, countries have yielded to the authority of various international regimes; indeed, even to ones that have no democratic institutions of transparency, accountability, and representation. Thus, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has required all but eight countries (three that did not sign it plus five that were "grandfathered" as nuclear powers) around the world to be subject to intrusive regulations. More recently, the World Trade Organization has routinely developed rulings that even the most powerful countries in the world have been forced to comply with. The European Union, as tottering as its project seems to be at present, is yet another example of rule-making at the supra-national level, a concession that was agreed to by the member states on the understanding that it was of advantage to all to have a continent-wide regime to govern certain issues like standards for education, health, and the environment.[*]

Moreover, national governments are themselves forming a variety of networks with each other, and sometimes with non-state organizations, recognizing the need for broad strategic cooperation on critical issues. Examples can be found in the Alliance of Small Island States and the Arctic Council, which are focused on addressing the impacts of climate change, and the G20, which is developing a concerted developing country trade strategy. Sometimes, these networks are less formally defined and comprise government officials and legislators. For instance, the Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE) was founded in 1989 primarily in the form of an environmental NGO composed of parliamentarians who seek to share information and potentially develop coordinated policy on the environment. There are several other networks of legislators, judges, and bureaucrats through which the participants formulate new ideas together and pursue common goals, resulting in what has been termed "disaggregated sovereignty" (Slaughter, 2004). Whereas traditional concepts of sovereignty emphasized the separation

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[*] The EU is hardly a perfect model of the type of regional polity envisioned here, however, not only because it relies on the endurance of individual states, but because its supporters' rhetoric continually invokes a new supra-national image, namely, that of "Europe", whose own imagined historical identity can be as problematic as were the nationalist projects preceding it. Hence the confusion over membership in the EU of border states like Turkey which presumably do not entirely share a European "culture." (See also Chakraborty, 1997).

of power into territorially independent entities, with international decision-making occurring through a painful process of negotiation, the new trend appears to be an attempt to bypass the bottlenecks of such a politics by allowing networks to develop modes of formal and informal obligation to seek practical solutions to global and regional problems.

The center of gravity of business regulation has already shifted from the national to the global stage, with organizations such as the WTO, the OECD, IMF, Moody's, and the World Bank, as well as various NGOs often playing a stronger role than national governments (Braithwaite and Drahos, 2000). Non-state players, sometimes teaming with inter-governmental organizations and aid agencies, and at other times organized as independent advocacy groups, are also seeking remedy beyond national borders to address global harms: conflict, environmental damage, health crises, human rights abuses, poverty, and so on. The focus is increasingly on the positive capacity of both the official bearers of sovereignty—primarily the dominant powers in the world today—as well as those on the outside—the emerging global coalitions of activists and NGOs. In some cases, this has meant abiding by treaties that deny the rights of domestic legislatures to enact certain laws. Even the United States, which in its domestic political rhetoric is conspicuously isolationist and aggressively resists conceding to international regimes, is a participant in many of the new experiments of disaggregated sovereignty that remain outside the limelight.[*]

Clearly, it would be a gross exaggeration to suggest that these tendencies, broadly associated with the name "globalization", are themselves likely to cause states to wait meekly in line to relinquish their sovereignty. Indeed, it seems there is already some evidence that globalization is simply generating a shift in the terms of reference of sovereignty and territoriality, with states adopting mercantilist strategies to consolidate their power in what Saskia Sassen has termed a "denationalization of national territory". Yet the pressures on sovereignty are perceptibly on the rise, driven by ethical considerations and the course of economic and political history. If, to return to a phrase I borrowed earlier from Nancy Fraser, there is a palpable sense in which we feel "gerrymandered" into living in states, that has already put in motion a broad, if unspecified, political agenda to change existing institutions of territorial sovereignty. We see it in the call for immigration reform even from right-wing politicians, in the growing power of civil society organizations to get countries to ratify the International Criminal Court against the might of the one country that has most to lose by conceding power to a third-party arbiter of cross-border justice, and in the broad recognition among different constituencies that meeting the climate change challenge implies that the world's most powerful states may be obligated, both ethically and politically, to make some of the greatest concessions.

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[*] The American state has an unusual combination of a fragmented polity, an ideology of exceptionalism, and the imperial notion of a "frontier democracy" (Skocpol, 1993; West, 1997), which complicates its ability to sell the idea of taking a back seat in international politics to its domestic constituencies. But Slaughter (2004) points to several instances of US governmental organizations that have undergone radical shifts in their operations to allow global network power to override domestic decision-making.

In fact, the most promising developments towards a shift in political systems are themselves necessarily political in nature, and will be strongly influenced by the growth and globalization of new social movements e.g., the Bolivarian movements of Latin America, Friends of the Earth, various efforts to support the International Criminal Court, the *intifada*, the World Social Forums, and the Zapatistas (see Kriegman, 2006). These movements, working in conjunction with Green political parties and progressive labor and civil society organizations, may well tilt public opinion towards a new "globalism," which becomes just as compelling as nationalism has been since it emerged a mere two centuries ago. An ideological shift away from hyper-nationalism may also be envisioned in those parts of the world where demographic shifts resulting from immigration and cultural change begin to extend cosmopolitan sentiments, which in due course become more persuasive than the smolders of xenophobia and sectarianism.

Despite the often incongruent character of their strategies, interests, sites of action, and political roles, these projects resemble one another as transnational network forms that seek to remedy global injustices in the name of a transformational politics (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Whether they will cohere, continue to adhere to ethical principles that are consistent with human and ecological well-being, and ever develop the groundswell of support needed to overcome entrenched political power is not a question that we can address easily. Nor is it clear whether, in order to obtain global justice ultimately, we would have to put up with the creation of patently unjust and illegitimate global structures of power that are tolerable to the interests of the most powerful current nation-states (Nagel, 2005). But there is no doubt that a new form of politics and institutional arrangements are starting to emerge. And that, as Zygmunt Bauman reminds us, is "our consolation", (the only consolation available, but also—let me add—the only one humankind needs when falling on dark times), that "history is still with us and can be made" (Bauman, 2002).

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