

Global Democracy

The Struggle for
Political and Civil Rights
in the 21st Century

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Global Village and Global Community

IT HAS BECOME A cliché that we live in a global village, that the world has shrunk, and that what is done in one country has repercussions on the other side of the planet. On the other hand, nationalism remains a very potent sentiment, few people regard themselves as global citizens, and many doubt that global citizenship could ever become a widely shared identity.

It is important to ascertain the existence of some sort of global political entity because any conversation on global democracy would be irrelevant if there were none. If we live in a global village but few of us feel part of a global community, is that a sufficiently strong foundation on which to build global democracy? I claim that it is enough. I am going to argue that there is a global political entity, which is characterized by apartheid. We all indeed live in a global village in which several communities are politically segregated according to the color of their passports (that is, their nationality) if not that of their skin. Since we cannot criss-cross the village with Berlin walls, and since apartheid is unacceptable, I argue that we will just have to learn to become global citizens, and that that is possible.

The notion of “global village” is used in different contexts: social, economic, or cultural. In the political context of this book, I will use the phrase “global village” as a metaphor to describe the fact that human beings are subject to common, global laws. More precisely, I will call “global village” the set of public policies that affect most if not all

people (or specific categories of people) throughout the world, whether those policies emanate from national or local governments, intergovernmental organizations, or even the private sector (such as industry codes of conduct or quasi-legal norms of the business or nonprofit sectors). The existence of such a global village has been extensively highlighted in the past fifteen years by the literature on globalization and particularly on global governance.¹ This literature asserts that nations are increasingly interdependent and that many public policy problems now transcend state boundaries. The key question of global governance is therefore who should set policy:

What is the proper constituency, and proper realm of jurisdiction, for developing and implementing policy with respect to health issues such as AIDS or BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy [or mad cow disease]), the use of nuclear energy, the harvesting of rain forests, the use of non-renewable resources, the instability of global financial markets, and the reduction of the risks of nuclear warfare? [. . .] At issue is the nature of constituency, the role of representation, and the proper form and scope of political participation.²

As defined, the global village has existed for centuries. It was already significant during the era of European colonialism, for instance, and acquired a new life with the creation of intergovernmental organizations in the early twentieth century. However, its density has definitely increased in the past fifteen years, thanks to both technological progress and the end of the Cold War, both of which have significantly increased international interdependence. International institutions (by which I mean institutions governing the relationships between sovereign states, such as intergovernmental organizations, treaties, and international customs) are more numerous and active than ever before. National public policies also increasingly affect people around the world, even when they are designed for the public of a single country.

For example, there is no global treaty on antitrust matters at this time, yet there is a *de facto* global competition policy, which the European Union and the United States set for the whole world. When two multinational companies want to merge, antitrust civil servants in Brus-

sels and Washington assess whether the merger would, on balance, be beneficial to European and American consumers respectively (a larger, merged company may be beneficial because it could achieve economies of scale and some of the savings could be passed on to consumers, but it may also be harmful if the merged company is too big compared to its rivals and practices monopoly pricing). Multinational companies that ambition to have a truly global scale usually have a significant presence in the European or American markets because of their sizes and therefore need the blessing of the European or American authorities to merge. On some occasions, a proposed merger accepted in Washington was rejected in Brussels or vice versa, and it was in effect killed because the would-be merged company needed to be active in both markets. When a merger is accepted across the Atlantic, however, it becomes a *fait accompli* for the rest of the world. Other countries may be able to curtail the monopoly power of the merged company on their own markets, but their domestic companies would have to compete with a new behemoth on the global market, whether they like it or not.

The global village's density has also increased in that many public policies are now explicitly meant to apply uniformly across the world. In the past, although trade policy was decided in the framework of an inter-governmental organization, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (precursor to the World Trade Organization), it was mainly meant to manage the interfaces between national economies. The main policy tool was import tariffs. One country's tariffs did impact on another country's companies. But tariffs served as valves allowing exchanges between national markets that were otherwise subject to different national economic policies. Each country could negotiate its own import tariffs *à la carte* to ensure consistency with national economic policy. While this remains the norm, the World Trade Organization now increasingly edicts rules, such as minimum intellectual property rights, that are meant to apply uniformly in all its member-states. They are meant to create a global market, not to manage the necessary minimum interfaces between national markets. Rules that apply uniformly across the globe are more readily perceived as global public policies.

What is remarkable about the last fifteen years is, more than the increased density of the global village itself, indeed the growing conscious-

ness of its existence. The term “global governance” appeared only about twelve years ago, reflecting a new consciousness about living in a “global neighborhood” requiring global public policy.³ That consciousness is not the privilege of political scientists, but is increasingly rooted in large segments of populations around the world. This is particularly true in the economic realm, as people are becoming conscious that their jobs are vulnerable to global public policy decisions.

Claiming new political rights flows from that consciousness. Very few people use the term “political rights” in the global context, yet the notion has already taken hold. People are conscious that they are affected by global public policies. They therefore feel stakeholders of these policies and want a voice in shaping them, whether or not they are citizens of the state—if it is a state—that introduced a given policy. For some, claiming global political rights is a natural corollary of the consciousness of being affected by global public policies. For others, especially for people who have not been accustomed to democracy at the national level, it is more of a leap. For most people, the consciousness is very vague as they cannot necessarily name either the global public policies of which they feel a stakeholder or the institutions that decided those policies. It is also very limited, as they are conscious of only a fraction of all the aspects of their lives that are affected by global public policies. But for a minority of active citizens around the world, that consciousness is both better informed and more encompassing. They can see global public policies as a system that affects not only themselves but everyone. They know intimately that they live in a global village.

People’s consciousness about the global village is what drives the call for global democracy. The right to participate in global public policy decisions will become a human right when it is first claimed and then widely recognized as such. The claiming has started and the recognizing is likely to follow in due course. The human rights that are now enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which includes political rights at the national and lower levels of government only) emerged in the same way. In a sense, women and men, or blacks and whites, had a moral claim to civil and political equality ever since the dawn of humankind. But it was only in the Enlightenment era that some people became aware of that intrinsic equality, only in 1945 that human rights were enshrined

in a universal declaration, and only recently that human rights brushed away other philosophical foundations to the margins of world politics. Likewise, nationals of poor and rich countries, of weak or mighty ones, have had a moral claim to political equality in shaping global public policies ever since the global village took shape, but it is only very recently that a critical mass of people have become conscious of that claim—and it would take another few decades before global democracy would be enshrined into most international institutions.

WHILE MOST AUTHORS OF the global governance literature would accept the existence of a global village, they would at the same time assert that there is currently no global community.⁴ The notion of political community refers to a sense of togetherness and solidarity shared by all members of a given society, thanks to which they consent to observe their government's rules even when they do not agree with them, for the sake of the common good and in exchange for the guarantee that other members of society will do the same. The observance of laws is of course strengthened by sanctions against the deviants, but the idea is that government, and certainly democratic government, would not be possible without citizens accepting their roles and responsibilities as members of a given political community.

A political community is not absent at the global level. It is manifest in the proliferation of transnational networks of civil society organizations, and of the support that ordinary citizens lend to these organizations. It exists, it is growing, but its emergence does lag behind the rapid development of the global village and behind the growing consciousness of the global village's existence.

On paper, we already have a strong global community. The United Nations' Charter asserts that "we the peoples" will cooperate to solve all the world's problems. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes the bold assertion that every human being is equal. Most national politicians, particularly in the West, would not dare declaring publicly that the claim is not true, that some humans are worth more than others. Yet that is unfortunately what their decisions reveal. The international community has spent an estimated \$2 to \$6 per beneficiary on emergency assistance to save the lives of civilians affected by various conflicts

or natural disasters in Africa in 2000 (against a peak of \$19 for Rwanda in 1995).⁵ This compares with about \$47 for Kosovars the year before. White Europeans just seem to be worth more than black Africans. At the other extreme, Western governments will spend whatever it takes to rescue their own nationals in any emergency situation. Similarly, I recall that the American press paid about as much attention to the fate of three American soldiers captured by Serbian forces during a week of the Kosovo war of 1999 as it did to the three hundred thousand ethnic Kosovar refugees who were on the road that week. This reveals that, in the eyes of the American press and public, the life of one American was worth about the same as that of one hundred thousand ethnic Kosovars. And the life of one Rwandan was worth nothing at all in 1994. Considering such shallow and unequal solidarity among peoples across the world, it is hard to imagine the blossoming of a cohesive global community in the near future.

The philosopher Peter Singer has powerfully argued that we human beings really are one community.⁶ Even if we do not always feel that way, we ought to feel that way. But the ethical case for nurturing a global community does not stop there. Acknowledging the existence of a global village without a global community is resigning oneself to accepting global apartheid: a village within which different communities are intertwined yet politically segregated (in this case, along nationality instead of racial lines) and where minority communities impose rules on the majority.⁷ In the absence of a global village, the absence of a global political community would be less problematic. Singer's argument notwithstanding, each national community could go about its affairs without concern for others. But the fact that so many actions of one such community can purposefully or inadvertently harm others makes the situation more problematic. The problem is therefore not only that rich nations give relatively little assistance to save the lives of nationals of poor countries, however unethical that is. The problem is also that powerful nations, in order to cope with problems that concern all nations, set global public policies that fit their own interests but sometimes harm less powerful nations.

Since apartheid is plainly unacceptable, the emerging global community must be strengthened. People throughout the world must learn to become members of a new political community—while simultane-

ously remaining members of their local, national, and regional communities. Thousands of civil society organizations are already educating the public in that regard. And this book seeks to sharpen the understanding of what being a member of the global community entails.

However, again because apartheid is plainly unacceptable, measures to introduce global democracy should not be postponed until the global community becomes stronger. We need global democracy not just because people increasingly start feeling like members of a global community, but because they live together in the same global village and step on each other's toes. The driver of global democracy is the consciousness of the global village, not so much the existence of a vibrant global community.

It is possible to build global democracy on the basis of a weak global community, provided that it is done incrementally. I should probably reveal at this point some of my personal history that has shaped my thinking on global democracy. I was born with one nationality, Belgian. I have since acquired two additional national identities: European and Walloon (technically, only my Belgian and European nationalities appear on my passport). In the early 1990s, the Kingdom of Belgium went through a double devolution process. It amended its constitution to become a federal state with Wallonia as one of its federated entities, and acceded to a new European treaty that transformed the European Union into something quite similar to a federal state as well. It is well possible that I will lose my original nationality before the end of my life, as Belgium might split up in very much the same way as Czechoslovakia did. Like many Europeans, I feel comfortable with these multiple identities, even if I did not particularly feel Walloon prior to devolution. The point here is that institutions do influence identities and that identities can therefore change with institutions.

Of course, I realize that my case is exceptional. But in a historical perspective, it is the norm rather than the exception. Most existing nation-states were created artificially, through wars and marriages between aristocrats. In some cases, new states consisted of one big nation absorbing smaller ones. In other cases, especially in Africa, state boundaries were drawn by the colonial power without regard to the geographic distribution of national groups. One way or the other, citizens learned to

belong to their new state and develop a new national identity, generally over long periods of time. (The United States is one of the exceptions in that regard, as a sense of American identity separate from British identity drove the 1776 revolution.) Substate national or local identities have often continued to thrive despite the strengthening of the nation-state, forcing some nation-states to devolve power back to subnational federated entities (e.g., Britain and Scotland, Spain and Catalonia). In a very few cases, subnational sentiments prevailed and nation-states dissolved peacefully (e.g., Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union) or through civil war (e.g., former Yugoslavia, Eritrea). The norm, though, is that artificially created states have managed to become nations while allowing existing subnational and local identities to thrive, producing multiple national identities and allegiances.

The big difference between this historical perspective and my own Belgian and European experience is the absence of violence in the latter. Global democracy, if it is to be true to its liberal roots, ought to be not only nonviolent, but completely voluntary. It should only add rights and identities for people, not subtract them. That is, people should gain new opportunities to make their voices heard, but their rights to speak their own language or observe their religion should not be impaired in any way, for instance.

Whether violent revolutions are ever justified is an ethical question that is beyond the scope of this book. Historical evidence shows that most democracies have developed incrementally and peacefully through long periods of time, although with occasional spurts of violence. The French Revolution was perhaps the most brutal attempt to impose democracy by force and quickly. But, precisely because of its brutality, it did not produce an immediately sustainable democratic outcome. The American Revolution, by contrast, was much more an independence war than a revolution, as American states and towns had already laid the building blocks of democracy. Its outcome therefore held ground. If the global apartheid were as oppressive and left as little room for peaceful dissent as the 1789 French monarchy did, revolution might be an avenue to explore. But the better analogy is late nineteenth-century Britain, as some elements of global democracy already exist and others are develop-

ing through slow, incremental change. The best strategy to achieve global democracy is therefore to continue that trend, peacefully.

The example of the European Union provides a good illustration of how a global community could develop. Its institutions were created by the political elites of its original member-states at a time when the feeling of Europeanhood was no deeper or more concrete than the feeling of global citizenship is today. Once in place, European bureaucrats worked for several decades to develop a sense of togetherness among Europeans, both objectively by establishing a common heritage of laws and symbolically through civic education—or some would say propaganda. The result is that most Europeans now do feel that Europeanhood is part of their identity, whether that is a small part next to their national identity or a bigger one.

On several measures (e.g., penetration of international media and uniformization of pop culture, English as *lingua franca*), one could argue that the world is actually more integrated today than Western Europe was when the European Economic Communities (precursor to the European Union) were created in 1957. Moreover, a worldwide poll shows that cosmopolitan identity is not more pervasive in Europe today than it is in the rest of the world.⁸ Only 13 percent of Europeans say that they primarily belong to the world or to their continent, which is slightly below the world average. Cosmopolitanism is more prevalent in the Americas and less in Africa (although one could add that antic cosmopolitanism is also more prevalent in the United States, where nationalism thrives⁹). More interestingly, cosmopolitanism is significantly more prevalent among the younger generations. If the twentieth century's trend continued into the twenty-first century, the primary allegiances of the world's people born in the 2040s would be equally divided: A third would feel primarily citizens of the world or of their continents, a third would feel primarily citizens of their nation-state, and the last third would identify themselves first of all with their locality or town. Current trends might not continue, but they may just as well accelerate: Globalization has only been gathering pace in the past fifteen years. At any rate, the European benchmark seems to indicate that there is enough cosmopolitanism in the world to start building global democracy today—and indeed, that is what is happening.

That said, the recent debacle of the European constitution has revealed that the European political debate actually remains largely a collection of national debates mediated by the political elites of each country.¹⁰ Those national elites cannot drive institutional integration endlessly without the people sharing a strong common identity. The development of global democracy can precede and pull that of a global community, but only so much. They will progress hand in hand, through incremental change over several decades.