All communities are imagined. The ‘global community’ is no exception to that rule. But imagination turns into a tangible, potent, effective integrating force when 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. As far as the imagined global community is concerned, such an institutional network (woven from global agencies of democratic control, a globally binding legal system and globally upheld ethical principles) is largely absent… Our consolation, though (the only consolation available, but also—let me add—the only one humankind needs when falling on dark times), is the fact ‘history is still with us and can be made’ (Bauman 2002).

The small but influential segment of Anglo-American liberal scholarship that focuses on democracy theory seems only lately to have recognized that not only the rationale for the domain it chooses for its research—territorially bound entities—but therefore perhaps the very foundations of much of its theoretical edifice stand perilously exposed to revision as a result of processes we have come to call globalization. The challenges have appeared in multiple forms, involving the question of dealing with new actors with differing cultural histories and political expectations entering existing social formations, or the so-called “Dogville” effect; determining the legal and political status of growing numbers of stateless people and those at the borders of well marked out liberal democratic societies; and ensuring the fair and reasonable participation of all in addressing trans-boundary concerns such as AIDS, climate change, war, and deepening global poverty.

Since the end of the Cold War, both political theorists and their practitioner partners in foreign offices and multilateral institutions have expounded substantially on the problems and challenges of deepening democracy at home, meaning the West, of instituting it in so-called countries in transition and, to the extent reasonable, elsewhere in those cultures and contexts that would appreciate the effort. Their reasoning in these cases, nevertheless, has characteristically embodied an implicit “societalist” perspective, in the sense of assuming that the appropriate space of political action is by definition a circumscribed one whose boundaries are always already defined in terms of a specific culture or nation. But when asked to look beyond individual states and peoples, the mainstream of democratic theory has apparently had difficulty coming to terms with cosmopolitan expressions of democracy, in which an imagined global community becomes the backdrop for democratic reasoning and institutions.

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1 Presented at the annual meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Oakland, CA, March 16-19, 2005.
In this paper, I want to examine some of the aporias of mainstream democratic theory in terms of the options proposed by cosmopolitan democracy, but with the intent of exploring the site of global political community that the latter seems to presuppose. There are two main sections: first, I examine how liberal democratic theory within the nation state tries to defend itself from the apparent cosmopolitan threat; second, I explore some of the significant challenges to cosmopolitan democracy. Then, shifting registers, in an Appendix, I provide a narrative of an imagined global political space, mainly with a view to enlarging the discussion on rethinking the political project beyond the nation-state through an act of creative story-building.

**Bounded Democracy: Theory and Community**

As a working definition, it is useful to think of politics as the art of traversing the inevitable differences that exist between “I”s and the “we.” That is to say, regardless of how and where it is conducted and whatever its outcomes, politics is essential for managing human action for collective ends. In fact, even authoritarian rulers have to think about the public interest for their own survival, and thus hone their political skills every time they have to choose between pacification and armed repression to keep revolt at bay. Politics can be effective though not legitimate, that is to say, it can achieve certain collective ends through pathways that are seen as wrongful. But legitimacy is important for the long-term viability of a regime.

At the local level, the politics of community-level negotiation work quite well when the stakes are relatively small so that differences can be settled in the course of face-to-face communication among peers. When everyone is confident that the proposed solutions can create mutual benefit without causing much individual harm, the political process acquires legitimacy. It is mainly at larger scales that politics seems inherently less trustworthy, and the challenge has always been to increase people’s confidence in the political processes that take place at these levels.

In erstwhile monarchies, this was achieved when the king spoke on behalf of the “we” by claiming that he was the sole “I” who could represent the collective. The problem of politics in those regimes was largely one of resolving family quarrels, albeit violently, about who should wear the crown, but for the most part sovereignty (the king’s two bodies, as it were) was never in question. Nevertheless, there was also a persistent governance (i.e., administrative) problem: the sovereign had to gather enough resources (often in the form of taxes) to serve his people without causing them to be dissatisfied enough to turn against him. Ancient Egyptian rulers managed for several centuries to solve this problem by somehow sustaining the myth that the Pharaoh was himself divine, which caused people to fear and obey him. In addition, they created exceptionally successful administrative systems that provided water and other infrastructure services to everyone. Mostly, though, monarchs tried to stay in power 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 a few Greek city states some 2500 years ago, in Rome shortly thereafter, and spreading slowly to other countries following the Italian Renaissance in the early 16th century, the notion of popular sovereignty gained prominence, shifting the burden of legitimacy 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. There was also the need for a more responsible form of government, but paying for it (e.g., for protecting rights, providing services) required public decision-making. Democracy, in its broadest sense, seemed to offer the hope for lasting legitimacy because it takes to heart the notion that the various “I”s have equal status when they constitute the “we” as a political body. But while democracy has provided a useful symbolic gesture in suggesting that the “I”s collectively constitute the “we”, it has by no means been easy to operationalize this concept, that is, think realistically about granting equal political power to everyone.

Bernard Yack proposes that there are in fact two senses of the “we” constituting democratic politics:

But this new doctrine of popular sovereignty invests final authority in an *imagined* community, all of a territory’s inhabitants imagined as a collective body, rather than in any institutionally defined flesh and blood majority. As a result, it introduces a distinction between what we might call “the people’s two bodies.” Alongside an image of the people who actually participate in political institutions, it constructs another image of the people as a pre-political community that establishes these institutions and has the final say on their legitimacy. It is the latter community, not the majority of citizens, that is sovereign in this new doctrine. (Yack 2001): 519.

Indeed, something strange seems to have happened during the past two centuries or so. Nationalism, which—according to historians—*never* existed as a source of collective pride in prior periods, has since emerged as a peculiar ideology of a large community who may share a language, history or territory. Apparently, these feelings 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. This collective cultural identity was crafted with the direct purpose of deposing colonial masters or defeating invading armies, which helped motivate people to think positively about the nation starting in the 18th century in the Americas and Europe, and in vast and disparate regions such as South and South-East Asia (Anderson 1991; Chatterjee 1993)². Print media—and the novel, in particular—played a significant role in initially popularizing the idea of the nation as a shared

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² “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, B. R. O. G. (1991). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London ; New York, Verso. p.8.
community; radio and TV sustained it, but by then an entire body of international law was developed to protect it as a legal entity.

This, then, is the pre-political body, ever-present as an imagined community, which authorizes the establishment of representative democratic institutions. What lends the latter legitimacy are three further beliefs: a) they operate through transparent processes and allow access for some form of participation by citizens; b) in so doing they reflect broadly the “popular will” with regard to substantive issues of collective interest; and c) they provide opportunities for citizens to learn to trust one another’s motives even if they do not fully agree with their positions. When democratic institutions are well developed through participatory forums, transparent procedures and accounting methods and third-party recourse to conflict resolution, the political power of small coteries and special interests can be made less effective than they would otherwise be. But a number of other supporting conditions are also required for this to happen: common forms of education, equality of opportunity and moderate wealth parity, and high levels of trust within the society. More of this is possible in small, relatively homogenous societies than in sprawling ones with disaggregated histories. But, although it is tempting to think of the local as being inherently the site of good things associated with “neighborhoods,” it is worth remembering that Tammany Hall is as much the icon of local politics as ancient Athens.

It is in this context that we see the first major challenge to democratic theory emerging within the metropolitan centers of Europe and North America in the form of increasing demands from groups identifying themselves as such and as having specific needs. As “multiculturalism” thus appears to seep into these liberal democratic societies, organized and authorized as such, new claims 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

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3 I should note here that I deviate somewhat from Yack, who makes an important further distinction between the imagined communities of the “people” and the “nation.” For Yack, the “nation” is the imagined community that is culturally or linguistically derived, whereas the “people” is the source of political authority, understood more abstractly and identified with institutions.

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. The people, in contrast, presents an image of community over space. It portrays all individuals within the given boundaries of a state as members of a community from which the state derives its legitimate authority. (ibid.:520-521).

I won’t have occasion in this paper to provide an adequate defense for my resistance to this formulation, except to note that the forms of popular sovereignty that were invoked in anti-colonial struggles required the adoption of pre-existing institutional forms (in essence those of their erstwhile colonial masters). Resources that had already been created elsewhere were now available for creating the post-colonial nation’s “we” identity, albeit within an ever fragile image of its own history and territory. See also Mbembé, J. A. (2001). On the postcolony. Berkeley, University of California Press.
services and jobs. Notwithstanding the vast writing industry that continues to be sustained by this topic, liberal 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 across evermore diverse groups while serving the legitimate interests of individuals rather than groups per se.

Yet, as David Scott points out, this turn to culture among liberal democratic theorists is less about comprehending the political causes for the blood in the streets spilled by erstwhile struggles related to otherness than it is about defining “a culture-concept that best suits their political theory of liberal democracy.” Scott, 2003:96. In other words, just in time to address rising demands from all quarters for recognition as citizens having equal status, a new mode of post-War political theorizing and practice has transformed the antagonistic political space of cultural encounters into a juridical one for distributing goods around difference, in effect, creating a “world made safe for differences.” Thus:

In the democratic imagination of contemporary anthropology (indeed in the democratic imagination of contemporary Western discourse generally) the being of culture, the otherness of the Other as culture, is taken for granted. We now, literally, experience difference as culture. (103)... It is with this world that the idiom of culture-as-constructed meaning comports well, ... a world in which the otherness of the Other can be edifying without being threatening to the order of things. (111)

Expediently, then, the latest manifestation of political theory’s interest in culture answers an ideological demand for a post-ideological conception of democratic pluralism, a cosmopolitan idiom in which the otherness of the West’s Others, once a source of defensive anxiety and the object of truth-determining investigations, could be understood conversationally, anti-essentially, ironically, as mere difference. (111)

Whether or not these Benetton-like societies in affluent democratic countries can maintain the adequate combination of juridical and ideological power needed to limit political conflict situated around the marked identities of their citizens is an open question. But Scott’s argument suggests to us that the success or failure of these strategies within the borders of liberal democratic states is no guarantee for how plurality and otherness can be addressed at or beyond them, given the vastly more complex scale and scope of having to involve the multitudes who didn’t make it into these societies the first time around⁴.

⁴ Pluralism may face some strange contradictions when liberal democratic states are forced to apply it at (or beyond) their borders. This might explain why only those men of Asian or North African descent who were born to British, French, Canadian, or Australian parents or were otherwise “naturalized” in these places could successfully make their case as Britons or French, etc. for being rescued from an extra-territorial American prison in Guantanamo Bay. In practical terms, not everyone shares the same legal status in the world, notwithstanding a well-established body of human rights law. This is of course common knowledge to most residents of developing countries who are initially surprised that their harrowing experience even when seeking temporary visas for travel to industrialized countries is not the default.
To be clear, I am far from indicating here that liberal political theory’s efforts to include recognition as an ethical problem are either misguided or inappropriate. But I do want to emphasize that they tend to be circumscribed carefully within boundaries that have already been identified as constituting the suitable realm of inquiry, and subsequently help generate techniques of governmentality that would manage it. The multi-cultural challenge can thus be managed administratively, with theory being affected, if at all, only through tweaks à la Kukathas and Kymlicka. But what lurks in the background is the concern that liberal universalist ideals must perforce be reconciled with border management, as it were, which is why the temptation to essentialize culture and assert the primacy of “core democratic values” is never far away à la Huntington and Rorty, each no doubt in different registers.

Thus it is that Dennis Thompson, in his critique of cosmopolitan democracy, focuses on the practical concern of managing the much greater conflict brought about by expanding democracy’s realm to broader regional, if not global scope of widely differing cultures and values, suggesting that liberalism itself could be compromised if it were universalized:

The other problem with universalizing liberalism is that as soon as we move beyond the basic liberties recognized in international law and advocated by the human rights movement, internal conflicts break out within liberalism itself. The more communities or nations come under the dominion of liberal rights, the greater the likelihood of disagreement about what the rights should mean. Some of the disagreement is reasonable: neither side can be shown to be morally mistaken, even within its own moral or cultural framework… Disagreements over these issues [such as the right to abortion, or whether the state should spend more on preventative care than on life-saving therapies] occur now in politics within a state, particularly in multicultural societies, but they multiply as politics spreads beyond the state. (Thompson 1999): 115. (italics mine)

This brings us to democracy theory’s second major challenge, the problem of responding appropriately within and across territorial boundaries to refugees, immigrants and other stateless people. Thompson begins his paper from which the above quote is taken by describing a legal case involving an immigrant from Northern Italy to Germany who is denied educational assistance from the Bavarian government, on the grounds that he is not German. His mother wins an appeal at the European Court of Justice, which relies on European Council legislation which requires EU members to provide the same educational conditions to citizens of other member states that they would provide their own nationals. Thompson argues that this is problematic on two counts: first, because the EU is not sufficiently federal, it produces a problem of multiple majorities (which, he says, will be amplified in an extension of EU-like power to the global scale)—a challenge to democracy; and second, the rights being defended aren’t really those of citizens (i.e., national citizens), and are therefore stretch the limits of liberalism. Thompson proposes that deepening deliberative democracy within the borders along with cross-national
deliberation among citizens can help create the conditions for dealing with refugees and immigrants (as well as foreign policy, more generally) fairly.

Seyla Benhabib is less sanguine about this possibility, but suggests rather that the EU in particular has seen a “disaggregation of citizenship rights,” wherein one’s status as an outsider/insider within the national context has become further stratified and associated with a complex set of social, political and legal codes. But not only does the deterritorialized, disaggregated citizen lose her ability to articulate her loyalty to a single nation-state, she is left loose to affiliate herself with cosmopolitan networks with overlapping allegiances which are sustained across communities of language, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. But such networks are conducive to democratic citizenship if, and only if, they are accompanied by active involvement with and attachment to representative institutions, which exhibit accountability, transparency, and responsibility toward a given constituency who authorizes them in its own name. (Benhabib 2005): 15

Here, as well as in her earlier book (Benhabib 2002), Benhabib’s thesis is that the three legal fictions making up democratic sovereignty—homogeneity of the demos, autochthony, and the notion of the self-constituted ‘we’ providing legitimating voice—are increasingly in question. What then should take their place? Benhabib seems less certain, except to indicate towards regional constitutionalism, leading eventually to a sort of cosmopolitan federalism, which decriminalizes movements across borders and sets in place institutional arrangements to facilitate these, in a manner reminiscent of Thompson’s deliberative processes:

This implies acknowledging that the right to cross borders and to seek entry into different polities is not a criminal act, but an expression of human freedom and the search for human betterment in a world which we have to share with our fellow human beings. First admittance does not imply automatic membership. Democratic peoples will still have to devise rules of membership at the national, sub-national, regional and municipal levels. It is the people themselves, who through processes of legislation and discursive will- and opinion-formation, must adopt policies and laws consonant with the cosmopolitan norms of universal hospitality. (Benhabib 2005): 17

In addition, though, these erstwhile refugees—the “epitome of extraterritoriality,” in Zygmunt Bauman’s terminology—should eventually also have political voice and “while we can never eliminate the paradox that those who are excluded from the demos will not be among those who decide upon the rules of exclusion and inclusion—citizens will have to decide who will have the vote and who will not—we can render these distinctions fluid and negotiable through processes of continuous and multiple democratic iterations.”
So it seems that the nation’s borders do push back after all, and that even the historically contingent demos, no matter how artificial its make-up, might still have moral and legal precedence over outsiders. But globalization exposes yet another challenge to the narrower community-of-fate understanding within liberal democratic societies by revealing the scale and scope of global injustice. One doesn’t have to be a cosmopolitan traveler to Porto Alegre’s annual carnival to discover the extent to which poverty, war and environmental degradation are perpetuated by capitalist expansion and, more generally, by elite networks of state and non-state power. And while liberal theorists have been compelled to address questions of justice at the global level, many respond by curiously modifying their otherwise universalist positions. Thus, Rawls’ well-known extension of the veil of ignorance at the global level applies to peoples rather than individuals, so that the agents of international justice are states or societies (not even institutions), which are almost entirely responsible for “their people’s” fate. “Burdened societies,” Rawls writes, “lack the political and cultural traditions, the human capital and know-how, and, often, the material and technological resources needed to be well-ordered.” But the task of the wealthy societies “is to help burdened societies to be able to manage their own affairs reasonably and rationally and eventually to become members of the Society of well-ordered Peoples. This defines the ‘target' of assistance. After it is achieved, further assistance is not required, even though the now well-ordered society may still be relatively poor” (Rawls 1999): 111.

Brian Barry once famously explained why it makes sense to focus on states or societies rather than individuals when it comes to addressing any type of global injustice other than the most egregious violations of human rights: first, that intra-societal obligations are stronger than those to others on account of the greater mutual interdependence that members within societies have to each other; second, burdened societies may be backward because of intrinsic/historical domestic reasons; and third, the responsibility for addressing these ought to lie with the leadership of these societies (Barry 2005). But, as Beitz and Pogge among others have shown, it is no longer tenable to pretend that one’s private actions are immune from global consequence, nor that burdened societies are entirely responsible for their own conditions. There are both positive and negative duties towards the global poor:

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 exist in a coexist within a single global economic order that has a strong tendency to perpetuate and even aggravate global inequality.(Pogge 2001): 11

Pogge may be overstating the case on the seminal role played by the dominant political order in perpetuating the world’s ills, but the point has been made, I believe, that the conventional picture of distinct societies, cultures, and publics having (relatively) self-
contained ethical obligations is hard to defend. The need for global justice in the broader terms Pogge is describing has no obvious link to the problems we described earlier for democracy theory. After all, one might reasonably propose that all that is necessary is for the powerful countries of the world, starting with the United States, to increase their international aid disbursements as recompense 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. On the other hand, one could also read Pogge more radically as describing the symptoms of a crisis in liberal democratic theory, one that involves the untenability of the nation-state as the decisive site of democratic discourse around ethical as well as political claims. Indeed, Pogge’s “institutional approach to cosmopolitanism” and David Held’s invocation of “overlapping communities of fate” make it clear that liberal theory itself provides them with all the resources they need to break with the formulation that some of their less adventurous peers have settled on (Pogge 1992). In what follows, I will explore variants of this approach, in an attempt to try to answer the question that forms the title of this paper: Is democracy possible?

**Democracy Unbound: Cosmopolitan Politics and the Problem of Community**

The “part II” in the title of this paper is my tribute to John Burnheim who wrote a book with the same name two decades ago (Burnheim 1985). It also signals an epistemological break in democracy theory from the confines of the nation-state towards uncharted territory, that is to say, untested by historical precedent and unsupported by the rich philosophical discourse that has accompanied the imagined communities of cities and nations. Burnheim’s book contains one such proposal, an argument for a radical pluralist form of democracy – his word is “demarchy”—within a borderless world that is governed by dispersed specialist administrations composed of ordinary individuals drawn by lot.

The context of Burnheim’s labors seems to be existing territorially bound liberal democracies, whose corrupt electoral politics he wants to transform. This, of course, has little to do with the challenges to democracy I laid out in the previous section, but his solution comes within striking distance of cosmopolitan democrats. That itself is an interesting result, but not one that I want to explore here. For what is equally significant is that Burnheim draws on Athenian institutional forms for his inspiration, with two axes: separate decision-making groups for each function or issue in each local area, along with global ones for functions fulfilling a broader function; second, the decision-makers are chosen randomly from volunteers, and have strict term limits. The functional groups would themselves be at two levels: one involved with the process, the other with the content.

While Burnheim’s proposal contains an intriguing vision of a global polity, it also raises a number of problems, e.g., how to administer complex activities, how to determine which agencies are needed and what their inter-relationships would be, the role of the legal system, and so on. To the extent that Burnheim’s focus is on institutional design, these questions become relevant. But they are far less problematic than the political question of community that cosmopolitan theories face more generally. And that issue
also becomes starker when we examine those theories that purport to have an explicitly political bearing.

Indeed, “cosmopolitical” democratic theory is a different approach to taking on the challenge of breaking away from the constraining frame of the nation as the locus of all democratic political action (Archibugi 2003). Although characterized by an assortment of moral, institutional and political positions, it typically invokes a Stoic 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 “world government” in the conventional sense of dissolving states, 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.

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 should be non-coercive and consensual; d) 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 Burnheim-like formulation where 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 governance structure with networks of democratic forums from the local to the global and the use of diverse mechanisms to access public preferences.

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 trans-national politics: “global democracy is not just the achievement of democracy within each state,” (Archibugi 2004):439. But it is precisely this attempt to push the envelope in this border-erasing manner that flags critical responses to the project from realists, Marxists, and communitarians, largely on the grounds that the model fails to account for power relations and people’s indelible affinities with the local. The most

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5 The question becomes relevant because the mere invocation of administrative forms doesn’t express the “I-we” traversals that define politics. Thus, the Stoic claim of universal society was not to be “a true political society for the very reason that it lacked any semblance of the political relationships that made ‘citizenship’ a meaningful category” Wolin, S. S. (2004). Politics and vision : continuity and innovation in Western political thought. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press. : 74.
damaging of these criticisms for the cosmopolitical position, to my mind, relates to normative and theoretical arguments that relate to the formation of political community.

I begin with Kymlicka’s claim that “democratic politics is politics in the vernacular,” (Kymlicka 1999):121, which I take to have the literal meaning that Kymlicka provides, language is an important determinant of political community, as well as a metaphorical one, the only legitimate democratic politics is of the local. Kymlicka’s concept of local seems to allow for larger territorial scale than the city, but in some ways he navigates through the scale issue by invoking a particular notion of “community” whose real value lies in the sustenance of the very codes forming the vernacular. Thus, a common language and shared cultural practices can make up community, but this does not mean that diasporic communities crossing national borders can produce vernacular politics in the sense that Benhabib suggests they could, and do in fact, have. While globalization “need not undermine the scope for meaningful democratic citizenship at the national level,” he is “skeptical about the likelihood that we can produce any types of transnational citizenship.” (Kymlicka 1999):119. Decisions resulting from collective “deliberation are legitimated on the grounds that they reflect the considered will and common good of the people as a whole, not just the self-interest or arbitrary whims of the majority,” although “some sense of commonality or shared identity may be required to sustain a deliberative participative democracy.” (italics mine). But since Kymlicka is a multiculturalist, “deliberative democracy does not require a common religion (or common lifestyles more generally); a common political ideology (e.g., right versus left); or a common racial or ethnic descent.” Indeed, we can cut across all these cleavages and still be democratic, except for language, which complicates things, in which case, the “multi-nation states” will have to have “linguistic/territorial political communities” that are the “primary forum for democratic participation in the modern world.”

Kymlicka never really explains why, for instance, English-speaking peoples across the world cannot form a political community, other than by implicitly invoking the rather antiquated notion that territorial contiguity is important for political will formation. Archibugi’s answer to Kymlicka seems almost too conciliatory: he admits the practical concern of doing good democracy without a common language (although he cites India, Switzerland and the EU, more generally, as counter-examples) and agrees that the territorially bounded state will probably continue to be a significant player in a cosmopolitan democracy (Archibugi 2004). But the real question, which is more directly posed by Calhoun and Urbinati, among others, is the political status of the demos in cosmopolitan (or even “cosmopolitical”) formulations (Archibugi 2003). If cosmopolitan democracy wants to leap past the boundaries of the imagined community we now have in the nation, what new ideological motivation could conceive of new commitments and civic solidarity? In Habermas’ view,

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6 Of course, Benhabib doesn’t argue that democratic politics is possible among those with disaggregated citizenship rights in Europe, only that they can form networks of power that have no legitimacy in European political institutions. But see, for instance, some of the research conducted at LSE’s Transnational Communities Programme http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/
Any political community that wants to understand itself as a democracy must at least distinguish between members and non-members. The self-referential concept of self-determination demarcates a logical space for democratically united citizens who are members of a particular political community. Even if such a community is grounded in the universalist principles of a democratic constitutional state, it still forms a collective identity, in the sense that it interprets and realizes these principles in light of its own history and in the context of its own particular form of life. This ethical-political self-understanding of citizens of a particular democratic life is missing in the inclusive community of world citizens. (Habermas 2001): 107.

Habermas goes on to say that even if world citizens were to organize themselves at the global level and create some sort of democratic institutions, “they would not be able to generate any normative cohesion from an ethical-political self-understanding that drew on other traditions and value orientations, but only from a legal-moral form of self-understanding… Civic solidarity is rooted in particular collective identities; cosmopolitan solidarity has to support itself on the moral universalism of human rights alone.”

Nevertheless, the space for democratic politics can be enlarged when a well-functioning public sphere has access to conventional inter-state decision-making processes and thereby strengthen their legitimacy. Moving further, to broadening states’ perspectives to align themselves towards global interests, will only take place if there is the domestic interest for such a shift.

Archibugi indicates that the demos need be neither antecedent to nor independent from institutions, a position that directly counters Habermas and Yack, among others. For him, it is the practice of democracy (i.e., acting as if there were a world democratic order) and creating the institutions that would support it, that can build the ideological support for cosmopolitical thinking. There is much to admire in this sleight-of-hand even if it seems to lay itself open to further attacks. But, in fact, one might propose, as Sofia Nasstrom does, that all that these criticisms do is simply to place the question of democracy theory in the territorial nation-state back in center stage (Nasstrom 2003). For, one might reasonably suppose that the national demos is itself the result of a contingent historical event that was transmuted across erstwhile territorial monarchies. A variety of institutional orders other than the nation-state could have fulfilled the demands for legitimacy, but it so happens that the particular histories of post-Renaissance Europe generated these earliest imagined communities, whose replication elsewhere thereafter followed a trajectory determined by specific historical conditions and events.

Civic solidarity might require specific collective identities, as Habermas avers, but there is a wide menu of choices available, one that includes the global identity. What will it take to create a global community from this point onwards? At the very least, it will require a “conceptual re-framing” that will cause people to view their identities in global terms, with a sense of responsibility and respect towards others in remote parts of the

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world. This is not just a transformation in attitudes and behavior that needs to take place in wealthy regions; it is just as vital that the poor and disadvantaged peoples acquire a sense of “we-ness” that is inclusive and which empowers them with a larger group identity. A global community, if it is meaningful, will have to be constructed virtually, that is to say, it will have to be imagined, before it can become realized through institutional forms and practices.

Globalization is already enhancing awareness among very large numbers of rich and poor about our mutual interconnectedness through capitalism, the environment, intergovernmental organizations and security. It is by no means exceedingly uncommon for an image, printed word or an email from a stranger overseas to arouse feelings of empathy across borders. More typically, of course, trans-national emotions tend to be fear and anger, largely created by “tele-visual” stereotypes of other cultures and peoples. A major part of creating a global political community will be to find ways to fire up people’s creative imagination with a global sensibility that includes an ethic of care and responsibility towards others. This need not be stronger than local identities that are already framed around one’s local mores and environs, but it does require that there is no conflict with such identity formation across scales. It implies finding ways to overcome indifference towards others and reversing centuries of antipathy formed around racial and ethnic stereotypes. Building a global political community therefore means creating a global political imaginary, which perhaps exists today only in incipient form. What needs to be more fully articulated is the ideal implicit in the slogan of the anti-globalization activists, who proclaim “another world is possible!” The challenge, in other words, is literally to conceive (in both meanings of the word: to imagine and to create) human-scale action to build a truly democratic global society through strategic re-framing towards thinking and acting as if the globe matters.

In a narrower sense, there already exists a global political community involving four groups of actors: the powerful countries of the world (“G-8 network”); the intergovernmental organizations (“the Washington Consensus”); the global corporate entities (“business networks”); and large non-governmental advocacy organizations (“civil society networks”). As my remarks in parentheses indicate, these actors form networks that, with the possible exception of the last, are all elite, in the sense that ordinary people have little opportunity to join them. The individuals who traverse the global circuits of capital and power have already collectively imagined a borderless world with privileged groups extracting surplus economic and cultural value from the majority, but it is not the world that the rest of us really want to inhabit. Their imagined community is contingent on the unhampered growth in the mega-forces of capitalism and whose power seems target-less but is in fact omnipotent.

Networks, by themselves, are not the problem; rather, they are in many ways part of the solution for managing difficulties related to scale and scope that are relevant at the global level. Networks build social capital, that is to say, they enhance trust and can therefore help overcome Olson’s collective action problem. That is to say, even a large group that

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8 According to Russell Hardin, group identification, implying a commitment and “concern that a person has with the interests of a particular group” (p. 10) actually arises out of self interest through personal
has built up a great degree of internal trust can be effective in gaining benefits through mutual cooperation around specific interests. Religious organizations that manage to motivate large numbers of people across countries and build bonds among people around common beliefs. Environmental groups are starting to build networks on a similar scale around specific themes like habitat protection for wildlife, but they seem to have greater difficulty than religious associations in crossing cultural and class lines.

Indeed, there are formidable difficulties in forming such networks across traditional divides. Imagine, for instance, attempting to build social connections between women in the Sahel earning less than a dollar a day and affluent executives in the West. But perhaps the fact that their experiences are far apart is less important than the fact that they may have some interests in common, e.g., the welfare of their children and grandchildren, good health, a felt need for fairness, absence of persecution, and so on. Transnational affiliations formed around interests seem have the greatest chance of building global networks. After all, many more people share interests than experiences; moreover, it is also possible to motivate large numbers to come together around common platforms. The challenges are to explore whether open (i.e., non-elite) global networks are conceivable not necessarily around similarly shared experiences, but around shared interests.

If the average person views with suspicion global politics even when it is recognized as having democratic forms, it is because the corresponding “I-we” negotiations seem to take place at remote locations with only the semblance of citizens’ involvement. Although civil society organizations—especially advocacy groups—can play an important role in bridging the gap by raising difficult questions in public forums, large and powerful interests may have much better access to decision-making and, thereby, greater control over outcomes. Without sufficient commitment, reciprocal trust, and leverage in the right forums, a big civil society group may, paradoxically, not be able to play an influential role in large-scale political arenas.

Is democracy possible? A partial answer is provided in the Appendix, where I try to draw out an imagined world of cosmopolitical community. The idea of this thought-experiment is to envision democratic arrangements at the global level that could foster a radical pluralism without undermining 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 important features so as to ensure that it remains a legitimate and therefore desirable idea for all of humanity.


This, for him, explains nationalism in rational choice terms but the question is an open one as to whether it could be one of the bases for postulating a new “globalism.”
References


Appendix

It is late in the 21st Century, and a new democratic global politics is thriving

In the late 21st 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. The “nation-state” appears mostly only in history text books; it has virtually disappeared as a strategic and operative entity. It is now archaic to speak of “territorial integrity” as a geopolitical principle and of “nationalism” as an ideology. In their place is a new vocabulary stemming from a radically altered sensibility towards the long-term security of biomes and communities up to the entire biosphere and the human race. Geopolitics is no longer organized around territorial entities, but pertains more faithfully to “geo” or earthly matters such as human security—protecting the vital core of human lives to enhance freedoms and fulfillment—and ecological protection.

Indeed, politics as an activity does not disappear. It remains, as it was understood in classical times, the graceful art of negotiating the inevitable differences between “I”s and the “we” in order to accomplish both proximate and long-term ends. But the units and purposes of political organization have been transformed fundamentally. Political communities are formed at multiple levels: locally, at the point of everyday face-to-face interactions; regionally, around ecosystems, watersheds, and cities; and globally around issues of worldwide concern. They correspond to the compound affinities, identities, and types of citizenship that people form at the local, “eco-regional,” and global scales.

The associated institutional arrangements that confer rights and solicit responsibilities at these different levels are based on the principle of subsidiarity, where governing bodies perform tasks that are best suited to their scale of operation. Thus, local authorities may be associated primarily with the management of the local economy, policing functions and service provision of education, housing, transportation, and health care; eco-regional governments would be responsible for the planning aspects of many of these same concerns within the context of ecosystem demands and constraints; continental scale administrations and global politics would be relevant for resolving inter-regional conflicts and managing commerce, and relate generally to matters of worldwide concern, including climate change, biodiversity, global peace, and space exploration.

The nested relationship to democratically engaged decision-making at larger scales thus functions from hamlets, townships, and cities of various sizes and forms, through eco-regions to global institutions, all of which are major sites of political activity. Ordinary people do not feel sickened by politics, as they did in the distorted democracies and authoritarian regimes of yore, because now there are sound institutional safeguards against “capture” by special interests and powerful entities. In addition, disparities in

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9 This is a slightly revised version of a narrative posted by Chella Rajan and Paul Raskin in www.gtinitiative.org.
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 lawmakers. 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.

Political activity is based on personal choice, dependent more on one’s interest and convenience, than on access to forums of decision-making. This is true at any level of political engagement, from the local to the global, given advancements in communications technology that allow for associations to be made across the globe that approximate face-to-face interaction. Choosing whether or not to be active in 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. Regional and global civil society organizations typically facilitate political engagement at larger scales, but new institutional arrangements also promote direct individual access to decision-making at different tiers and around complex themes relating to resource use and distribution, without the mediation of other organizational structures. Thus, while representative forms dominate politics at larger scales, the scope for direct participation in particular forums is enhanced by advanced communications technologies for those wishing to be so engaged.

Both local communities as well as their larger-scale agglomerations (eco-regions and the world) have certain basic institutional arrangements in common: different levels of the judiciary, powers of enforcement, and an open and participatory democratic government. At local and eco-regional levels, each community adopts 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 scales, there is a high prevalence of routine face-to-face and electronic town-hall meetings, 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.

The revitalization of communities brings with it a renewed sense of pride and involvement in local activities; yet, continuous contact and communication with people who are not ordinarily local residents, 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 someone who perceives the larger implications of her actions and feels responsible towards humanity and the natural world. Her rights and responsibilities are local, eco-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.
Contrasting the “hyper”-global advanced capitalist economies that characterized the turn of the century, products and services tend to be developed wholly and locally wherever it is sensible do so, rather than disconnectedly across regions, using proximately available resources and involving innovative production systems. But these are not autarchies and inter-regional trade still has an important role where comparative advantage really matters; for instance, arid regions may import grain and export renewable energy services, and textiles, specialty foods and other cultural artefacts are widely traded. The priorities of community and environmental integrity drive policies on subsidies, taxes and capital access. The political economies of production and consumption are just, and allow for people to have more free time 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.

Farthest from the everyday experiences of ordinary people, and yet informed by them and accessible to all through modern communication technologies, is a global polity developed under the framework established by the world Constitution, which was drafted in 2032 under the technical name Global Agreement on Integrated Activity, and referred to universally by its acronym – GAIA. GAIA’s institutional arrangements consist of three organizational entities: a directly elected Parliament with a rotating Executive Committee; an administrative branch; and a judiciary. Its main political instrument is the global Parliament, which is composed of representatives from all over the world. Its judicial system serves to prosecute those who seeking to violate others’ human rights or willfully damage ecosystems. The world Constitution 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. GAIA’s main purpose is to create standards and guidelines of common interest and uphold the Constitution. There is much of common interest at the global scale: climate protection, water resource management, biodiversity protection, sustainable food production, trade, and human rights, space exploration, cultural and scientific activities, and more. In many ways, GAIA’s institutions are a strong replacement to the original idea of the United Nations, with a global civil service, except that representation within it is not based on nation-states but on local and regional communities. 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. GAIA works with four administrative units or Regional Councils (RCs) to manage continental affairs in Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Europe.

The recently enacted Global Peace Treaty mirrors 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. 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; antiquated block-buster war films are scorned, as are the toys and games that proliferated less than a century ago.
Group identification primarily takes place at the local, eco-regional and global levels, a major break from the past, when nationalisms of various kinds fueled conflict.

Local communities and eco-regions have adequate representation in GAIA, and while not every smaller unit has a delegate, 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. Revenue collection (taxation) is done locally, 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 are also needed 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.

In the initial stages, there was some political lop-sidedness among different areas in the world. Asia-Pacific had lots of human and financial capital, but relatively few natural resources. Europe lacked human capital and natural resources; the Americas were in reasonably good shape, 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 and malnutrition, environmental degradation and resource scarcity, discrimination based on gender, sexuality, race or religion, and inadequate access to services.

With the introduction of the world Constitution, the uneven geographical dispersion of endowments was viewed as a given, “opportunity” rights were equalized and appropriate institutional forms were established to mandate the stewardship of nature. Consequently, there was just enough migration to allow human development to flourish among those who were most deprived, while the generalized provision of social, environmental, political, and human rights helped to further enhance the quality of life for others who were already comfortably well-off. As in other domains, a major transformation towards sustainability is underway, but it is not the end of history. Rather, politics as an activity has 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. Popular sovereignty remains a contested space, but at least the king is truly “beheaded.”
The GC, the RCs, and other governing units below act in concordance with the principle of subsidiarity, as mentioned above. They take some cues from the design of the European Union in the late 20th century, whose activities were limited only to those that were better performed in common than by member states individually.

This evolved out of the model originally proposed by Richard Falk and Andrew Strauss: http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/role/globdem/globgov/2001/0418gap.htm

Immanuel Kant’s essay on “Perpetual Peace” provided a good starting point for this charter, with the peace established not among “states” but among RCs and local communities. See http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kant/kant1.htm