

On the New Faces of Democracy

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Geneviève Nootens, *Souveraineté démocratique, justice et mondialisation. Essai sur la démocratie libérale et le cosmopolitisme*, Montréal : Liber, 2010, 204 pp.

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For about twenty years, the democratic studies have been witnessing their rebirth. At the national, inter-national or global level, democracy seems to attest that even if its place as political regime winner can no longer be contested, its modalities of performance are permanently challenged by the realities of globalization. Despite the recent and fruitful works whose attempt is to demonstrate the necessity of exporting the democratic model outside the national frontiers, there are still a lot of uncertainties regarding the mission, principles, norms and institutions of cosmopolitan democracy (which encapsulates the national, inter-national and global democracy). To this respect, the latest book of Geneviève Nootens, *Souveraineté démocratique, justice et mondialisation. Essai sur la démocratie libérale et le cosmopolitisme*, embodies the efforts to diminish the doubts about the truth-like model of cosmopolitan democracy. A member of the Canada Research Chair in Democracy and Sovereignty, Department of Political Sciences, University of Québec, Chicoutimi, G. Nootens is mainly concerned with the reconditioning of democratic practices and the diffusion of sovereignty, the distinction between majority

and minority nationalism, the logic of plurinational societies. In addition, her research has already proven significant results in the previous work, *Désenclaver la démocratie. Des huguenots à la paix des Braves*, Montréal: Québec Amérique, 2004 and in the book written with Ryoa Chung, *Le cosmopolitisme : enjeux et débats contemporains*, Montréal : Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2010.

All through the six chapters, completed with an introduction, a conclusion and a set of references to the most recent and relevant studies on national and transnational democracy, the reader enters the intricate dimension of a new democratic reality searching for its appropriate meaning. Since the beginning of the book, the author announces her intention to analyze the manner in which, at the international level, the social-economical disparities between the populations of the globe and the consequences of the conflicts put into question the effectiveness of liberal democracy. At the same time, is it possible for the democratic model to transcend the national-state borders as to achieve a new, supranational, identity?

The starting point for her research is the assumption on the meaning of the democratic regime perceived as a political system able to exercise political power over the people. Such a definition explores the social dimension of democracy, the arena where the political relations of solidarity and the relations of power evolve. If the political process of democratization at a global dimension involves breaking the physical and the symbolic frontiers of the national governing model, then only cosmopolitan democracy might represent a plausible context of the individuals' inter-connections. Despite other scholars whose concerns are especially the institutional aspects of cosmopolitan democracy, the Canadian author is preoccupied with the principles which should govern states and the world on the path to democracy. If citizens of all states were perceived and treated like citizens of the world, subsequently, it is not relevant to evaluate the relation between individuals and institutions or organizations. On the contrary, democracy should be analyzed as the political form of government where groups and small communities inter-action, change information and determine the decision-making process.

Starting with the first chapter, the five principal characteristics of liberal democracy – civic and political rights, representation, social rights, the separation of powers, and the existence of the demos which generally uses the majority rule – highlight the institutional design of a political regime whose finality is the equality of rights and liberties between individuals. The twenty-first century context with all the implications of globalization determines the manifestation of new challenges for the nation-state. Answers to questions such as “How well could liberal democracy and globalization coexist?”, “Which is the distance between the decision-making process and participation?” are, in fact, some reactions to the reterritorialization and the diffusion of sovereignty.

The second chapter, revealing the relation between democracy and globalization, suggests that external pressures stimulate changes at the state level, affecting its autonomy and sovereignty. As a matter of fact, the author tries to establish the limits of what can be called the democratization of international politics. Despite the skepticism which regards the institutional conditions for a real democracy, the common values, culture and language, the maintenance of the state sovereignty, G. Nootens manifests her optimism concerning the imminence of translating the democratic model to the international sphere. The reasons determining her to manifest such expectations are a) the moral imperative that institutions should shape the social aspects of reality; b) the global institutional design which represents the result of human conventions; c) the fact that the international community is revealed as the highest and the last level of political community. Transnational democracy must gather all the states’ awareness of the necessity to recognize the status of citizens of the world for all the people. No matter how the transnational institutional configuration and the cooperation between states or citizens may look like, the new democracy has to reunite the old forms of democracy in order to choose what is best for it.

The third chapter (*Démocratie et cosmopolitisme*) proposes, from the cosmopolitan democracy perspective, an analysis on the status of the individuals. The process of

internalizing and globalizing democracy and the role of the people in the decision-making process suffer several mutations both at the empirical and at the theoretical level. The emergence of international nongovernmental organizations, the evolution of the technique, and the intensification of the communities' inter-actions determine some mutations of identity and rights for all the peoples of the globe. Consequently, they do not only need to be recognized as belonging to a certain state – national citizenship –, but to the world – cosmopolitan citizenship. A form of global ethics, cosmopolitanism, with all its moral juridical and institutional implications, becomes the space of expressing the essence of cosmopolitan citizenship.

As a prolongation of the previous chapter, the fourth part consists of a critique to a certain particularly worthy set of contributions to institutional cosmopolitanism, the ones made by the British author, David Held. His conception regarding globalization and institutional cosmopolitanism is contested especially due to its impossibility of organizing the relations between political communities in a multi-level democracy and to the false impression that individuals are always connected directly and tightly to supra-national institutions, therefore omitting groups, small communities. Although Held proposes a series of institutional reforms in order to create a *de facto* cosmopolitan democracy, he neglects the deliberation in the decision-making process and takes into account only the political aspects of the new world configuration, thus disadvantaging the impact of economical development over it and reproducing the sovereign state model at a global scale. In reality, G. Nootens uses this series of critiques as instruments useful to outline her different perspective on cosmopolitan democracy, based on the dialogue between communities and on the principles of justice, of legitimacy.

The last but one chapter focuses on the new international reality in which *demos* is replaced by *demoi*, in which political communities and democratic legitimacy must reform both the national and the global sphere of decisions. In order to witness significant changes at the global level, it is necessary to observe the nation-state challenges. When

recognizing pluralism, the state can no longer be perceived as a big unified national community – the national liberal democracy –, but as a plurinational democracy. This assumption reveals its very importance because cosmopolitan democracy can never eliminate the democratic model specific to the national level; on the contrary, it is built on it. More than that, G. Nootens not only affirms that both levels are complementary but, in order to demonstrate their efficiency, they must face different approaches. States and internal institutions, organizations are in the situation of recognizing the importance of communities and their permanent need to communicate. Thus, by respecting the connections between communities, the real politics of recognition must be put to work at the level of institutions, norms and principles.

The sixth chapter seeks to answer the question regarding the possibility of plurinational societies to become agents of cosmopolitanism. Starting with the case of the Canadian Government, G. Nootens demonstrates that modifying the conception of sovereignty and the perception regarding who is directly concerned with state decisions, we can witness the consolidation of the plurinational societies governed by the politics of recognition. If sovereignty were seen as the different communities consent and if minorities were recognized as being able to govern themselves, the premises of assisting to the reform of democracy at the state level would already be created. In conclusion, cosmopolitan democracy – the multi-level democracy or the democratic forum of democracies – has all the chances of becoming reality as long as the state, inter-state and global principles and practices fulfill the conditions required by a complete democracy.

The work that the Canadian scholar has recently achieved demonstrates, without any doubt, the important contribution to the cosmopolitan democracy field research. The fact that the book brings together the politics of recognition, democratic legitimacy, the recognition of plurinational societies and the communities' connections represents the construction of a consistent model of global governance concerned with representing the will of the world's citizens. Its conclusions and projects for the future of democracy, completed with valid

criticism related to other scholars interested in the same field confirm their pertinence by improving a theory still very young and contested. In order to equilibrate the balance of analysis it is nevertheless necessary to observe the weaknesses of the book. The incomplete definition of cosmopolitan democracy as a starting point is associated with the unperceived limit of discussion regarding the national and the global model of democracy. Furthermore, she criticizes some contributions to institutional cosmopolitanism, reconstructing her new cosmopolitan democracy design based on some principles (the politics of recognition, plurinational societies etc.) necessary but insufficient to the *mise en pratique* of this model. In the end, how will cosmopolitan democracy really look like? However, the more passionate works like G. Nootens', the clearer is the future of democracy. As long as states encounter difficulties when facing the new international realities and citizens discover other ways of expressing their desires, democracy at all levels must readapt and improve its principles, norms and institutions.

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