What If We Took Autonomous Recovery Seriously? A Democratic Critique of Contemporary Western Ethical Foreign Policy

Olivia Umurerwa Rutazibwa
Ghent University, Belgium

ABSTRACT. Contemporary western ethical foreign policy, understood as foreign policy designed to contribute to the well-being of others – people(s), states and societies abroad – mostly looks at ways to do more, better or differently. Few accounts consider the need to do less or disengage to contribute to the others' well-being, thus leaving the principles of 'ethical retreat' and 'first-do-no-harm' by the wayside in the literature. In the present contribution we seek to do two things: look into the concept of 'autonomous recovery' put forth by Africanist and ethnic and civil conflict scholar Jeremy Weinstein; and compare it to the literature on domestic 'politics of difference' as developed by critical (African-) American and African democracy theorists such as Iris M. Young, Cornel West and Claude Ake. By engaging these bodies of literature, we seek to contribute to research on viable alternatives to domination and violence in contemporary western ethical foreign policy embodied in hierarchical differentiation and the ensuing homogeny in both agenda and actors. We argue that at the international level, building on the identified merits of autonomous recovery, rather than global governance based on universal principles, a politics of difference amongst international actors might serve as a basis for more ethical foreign policy. As a theoretical and practical form of ethical retreat, we propose a commitment to 'democratic hierarchy' in view of self-realization, instead of mere self-management as we see in contemporary ethical foreign policy based on far-reaching international involvement guided by the democratic peace thesis.

KEYWORDS. Ethical foreign policy, R2P, democratic peace thesis, politics of difference, domination, African democracy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The present contribution seeks to address how contemporary western ethical foreign policy, operationalized through external peace and state-building and a firm belief in the democratic peace thesis, obstructs

rather than enhances the others' democratic right to construct a future based on their own vernacular image (Merlingen 2006, 3; referring to Scott 1999).[1]

Both on paper and in practice, contemporary western international relations are, apart from the unpredictable and multidirectional pull of economic globalization, historically defined by a logic of ethical foreign policy from the west to the rest. In what follows, ethical foreign policy is understood as policy that is explicit about its intention to contribute to the well-being of others: people(s), states and societies abroad, drawing its legitimacy from a notion of benevolence.

Contemporary western interpretations of well-being are best expressed in what the democratization literature has labelled the Wilsonian Triad: liberal governance, peace and free market (Acuto 2008, 463). It is posited in holistic peace and state-building efforts, built on a firm belief in liberal democracy embedded in political freedoms, participatory and representative politics as well as liberal capitalist market economies. Even though there is no clear consensus on the definition of ethical foreign policy, most accounts link it to the fact that "[…] western government policymakers have […] explicitly taken on board normative and ethical concerns" (Chandler 2003, 296). Often the 1990s are mentioned as the decade in which ethical and normative concerns became explicit, suggesting a shift from international relations driven by purely national interest to relations in which actors also act in the interests of others.[2] If we take into account the central role of the idea of civilization in colonial times, it is probably more accurate to consider the rise of the ethical in foreign policy in terms of degrees, rather than as a clear break from an imaginary past in which there was no attention to the ethical.

Whereas there was a conviction in the 1980s that a thin state was sufficient yet necessary to achieve the Wilsonian version of the good life, today, next to a growing interest in individual subjects and non-state actors, the state has reclaimed a central role in contemporary assistance to fragile, failing or failed states (e.g. Fukuyama 2004). The assistance

agenda has been expanding, moreover, resulting in more invasive interventions, all the while using a language of autonomy and 'self-liberation' (Chandler 2012, 10). At its origin we find (i) the dual focus on both state institutions and private actors and individuals, (ii) the discovery of prevention over pacification and reconstruction and (iii) the growing importance given to liberal autonomy. Paradoxically, this autonomy is enacted through micro capacity-building technologies at the individual level to steer societies' preferences towards liberal democracy instead of the more openly dominant approach of, for instance, political conditionality.

The power embedded in this type of ethical foreign policy, which critical peace and state-building scholar David Chandler calls "civil society intervention" (2010, 382), is difficult to detect because it presents itself not as domination, but as emancipation as well as "consciously disavowing colonial discourses of fixed distinctions of superiority" (2010, 371), while at the same time reinforcing and re-institutionalizing international hierarchies of power (2010, 387). Michael Merlingen, a European foreign policy and international governmentality scholar, astutely describes this duality by making a distinction between the 'pastorate' and 'liberal' strand in today's western ethical foreign policy. The liberal strand is from Merlingen's reading of Foucault, "a rationality of power that imagines a form of governance that operates through the activation of the autonomy of citizens and the promotion of certain kinds of freedom from governmental interference. Liberal subjects are expected to be active participants in their own government and to assume responsibility for their own welfare and responsibility" (2006, 30). While this type of power also implies a form of subjectification, "the liberal subject is in a non-negligible sense freer than the pastoral subject" (Merlingen 2006, 30). The pastoral subject on the other hand, is shaped by the Christian image of the pastorate as used by Foucault to "describe a secular rationality of power that is based on the detailed knowledge and comprehensive regulation of those subjected to it. […] At the core of the pastorate is a paternalistic order of difference." It plays with the image of the shepherd, "a distinct and

superior kind of being" and the flock "to be cultivated and protected" (Merlingen 2006, 30). It is a particularly strong and fitting image to investigate contemporary ethical foreign policy as it also incorporates the element of goodwill.

Many debates on ethical foreign policy have a binary and antagonistic understanding of norms and interests, with ethical foreign policy supposedly prioritizing norms over interests. Here we bypass this binary approach by acknowledging that it can be highly beneficial for the western actors to engage in ethical foreign policy or project their foreign policy as such. International bodies like the United Nations potentially provide legitimacy for a growing array of ethically formulated far-reaching policy interventions in the domestic affairs of non-western countries by external actors, targeting both government and civil society (Acuto 2008, 465-467). These policies include non-exhaustively: (military) humanitarian interventions, budgetary aid via grants or loans, military aid, diplomatic pressure and dispute resolution, assistance in constitutional and other legislative reforms, democracy promotion through electoral observation and financing, direct or indirect support for liberal democracy by promoting specific civil society actors like women and youth, the media, civic and human rights NGOs and private economic actors or labour unions. David Chandler draws our attention to the fact that ethical foreign policies are less scrutinized in terms of delivery. For Chandler (2003), ethical foreign policy is a way for western actors to consolidate domestic legitimacy, while at the same time avoiding responsibility. If we add to this a Foucauldian understanding of the power and the violence embedded in norms diffusion, we end up with a picture of contemporary western ethical foreign policy that cannot be simply captured in a binary characterization of the good (norms) or the bad (interests).

This is where the normative framework of this article can be located: an attempt to contribute to literature that seeks to imagine alternatives to the current ethical foreign policy consensus in literature and in the field, in view of dealing with the – often unintended – elements of violence

embedded in what political theorist William E. Connolly (also building on Foucault) calls "the conventional politics of good and evil." It is not an evil that is intentionally inflicted by "immoral agents, […] but evil as arbitrary cruelty installed in regular institutional arrangements taken to embody the Law, the Good, or the Normal." Evil, in this understanding, is "an undeserved suffering imposed by practices protecting the reassurance (the goodness, purity, autonomy, normality) of hegemonic identities" (1993, 366). Merlingen sees both the realist pessimism towards ethical foreign policy (in a context of anarchy, good intentions stand for bad outcomes) and the liberal optimism (if it doesn't work out it's because it was badly conceptualized and/or implemented; 2006, 3) as limited to reflect on the 'first-do-no-harm' aspiration of the global ethical enterprise. For Merlingen, even the intervention that goes according to plan "may lead to new forms of unfreedom" (2006, 3). To address this issue constructively Merlingen turns to Foucault's 'exotic Parisian theory' which enables us to see [peace-building operations] as "a mechanism of power projection that is inevitably both enabling and constraining. […] The risk is that these constraints congeal into patterns of paternalism and domination, which stifle what David Scott (1999) calls the local demand for a future constructed in its own vernacular image" (Merlingen 2006, 3).

Both practitioners and scholars are aware of the limits of external state-building. There has always been a body of literature as well as voices on the ground cautioning on the dilemmas and contradictions in western ethical foreign policy. Most critiques are limited to the rather technical concerns of efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and coordination. In their book *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding. Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, Roland Paris, Timothy D. Sisk and others (2009) take on the task of listing all the inherent paradoxes in international post-war state-building.[3] While the literature does question "the assumption that greater external engagement can strengthen and cohere states, either in terms of prevention or rebuilding" (Chandler 2009, 36)[4], it is rare that the assumptions which legitimize ethical foreign policies are scrutinized to the

point that the interference is considered a part of the problem. African politics scholar Jeremiah Arowosegbe is conscious that past experiences do not add up to a convincing record of successful performance, but when it comes to peace-building operations in Africa, he and many others with him seem to accept nevertheless that they "will continue to require international attention" (Arowosegbe 2011, 662).

Paris and Sisk speak of three possible reactions to the paradoxes of external state-building: retreat (do less or nothing), reinvestment (do more) or reorganization (do differently; 2009, 12-14). Fearon and Laitin (2004) go as far as proposing a model of neo-trusteeship with exit strategy and Krasner (2004) plays with the idea of shared sovereignty contracts. The advantage of these accounts is that they advocate explicitly for implicit practices and assumptions in today's state-building enterprise consensus, thus bringing the need for international accountability more clearly to the foreground.[5] Most mainstream positions, as synthesised by Paris and Sisk, tend to dismiss the option of retreat and do not go beyond recommending a dilemma analysis to supplement the conventional planning process to devise "more nuanced and effective statebuilding strategies" (2009, 310-311), because they see the contradictions as a given, "unchanging and unchangeable, […] embedded in the very idea of externally assisted state-building" (2009, 305). Hence, in spite of the known limits and contradictions, the practice and literature on ethical foreign policy in the form of external state and peace-building efforts has been expanding over the years.

Few consider that the problematic elements in contemporary western ethical foreign policy might be such that they hinder the successful reconstruction or development of states and societies rather than contribute to it, thus entailing a breach of the equally overall accepted 'first-do-no-harm' principle. As it turns out, 'first-do-no-harm' is taken as a principle within external action, not a principle that could profoundly delegitimize contemporary external action. Hence retreat instead of more and different or better engagement as a viable ethical foreign policy option is only occasionally seriously considered, researched or discussed.

These accounts do exist though. Horn of Africa and democracy and governance specialist Bronwyn Bruton (2010) proposes the idea of 'constructive disengagement' from Somalia, and Africanist and ethnic and civil conflict scholar Jeremy Weinstein (2005) launches the concept of 'autonomous recovery' to which we will return below. Most of these accounts, however, focus in varying degrees on the strategic foreign policy concerns of the interveners, such as casualties, capabilities or political will, rather than suggesting retreat first and foremost as a form of ethical engagement through disengagement, i.e. because it might be beneficial for the receivers, in the short or the long run. In what follows, we want to contribute to research on ethical retreat in the framework of the ethical 'first-do-no-harm' imperative, rather than embedding it into a strategic policy choice framework. The most substantial difference consists in the fact that the well-being of the receivers is central in the considerations, rather than the paradoxical self-centeredness of the intervener as apparent in contemporary western ethical foreign policy in terms of agenda, motivation and actorness[6], all the while drawing its legitimacy from its care for others. We aim at developing an analytical framework to study ethical involvement differently. Instead of focusing on ways to stay involved and what the best course of action is in that regard, we fundamentally rethink the available options of ethical involvement by developing a justified ground for ethical retreat.

We do this by building on Weinstein's understanding of 'autonomous recovery' and we put it next to the concept of 'politics of difference' at the service of inclusive and substantive democracy in a domestic context of structural inequality, as developed by Iris Marion Young. To advance justice and democracy internationally, Young and other democratic theory scholars tend to call for global governance via international institutions based on universal human rights rather than politics of difference, although they are also very conscious about structural inequality playing out at the international level. Contending that this is not an adequate answer to the forms of domination in today's western ethical foreign

policy practices, we will explore the possibilities of a politics of difference in ethical foreign policy and how it relates to autonomous recovery and ethical retreat.

II. AUTONOMOUS RECOVERY: LETTING WARS RUN THEIR COURSE

In his 2005 paper "Autonomous Recovery and International Intervention in Comparative Perspective," Jeremy Weinstein makes a compelling case for 'autonomous recovery', which he defines as "a process through which countries achieve a lasting peace, a systematic reduction in violence, and postwar political and economic development in the absence of international intervention" (2005, 9). In contrast there is 'aided recovery', "a process in which international intervention plays a significant role in bringing war to an end, maintaining or guaranteeing a negotiated settlement, and assisting in the recovery process" (2005, 9). Building on the cases of Uganda, Somalia[7] and Eritrea, he calls for (i) letting wars run their course ("[…] sometimes it makes sense not to intervene" (2005, 30) or (ii) letting go of the "'delusion of impartial intervention' and intervene decisively on behalf of legitimate, competent military forces already on their way to victory" (2005, 30).

Weinstein finds two good reasons to let wars run their course. First, building on Luttwak (1999), he contends that wars come to an end when "one group is strong enough to win decisively, or when both groups are sufficiently exhausted that they become willing to accommodate one another" (2005, 9). In contrast, cease-fires and negotiated settlements "[…] allow the fighting parties to reconstitute their forces. They tend to do this especially if there is uncertainty about the durability of the agreement" (2005, 9). Secondly, he highlights a useful organizing principle in war-making itself, potentially conducive to stable state-making in the form of functional, representative, and self-sustaining institutions of government. The prerequisite for this outcome is that groups or states face a significant threat to their survival, that there is a significant domestic

revenue imperative, while having few external resources to reduce the costs of war (2005, 26).

Weinstein's most interesting finding on autonomous recovery is of a deeply democratic nature, as it speaks to the link between political elites and the rest of a country's population. To him, "war-making is a process that can provide strong incentives for competing groups to secure the consent of the governed, overcome sectarian tendencies in favor of more national identities, and develop the administrative capacity required to deliver public goods to their constituents" (2005, 26). In aided recovery, with international actors negotiating power deals with the political elites and NGO's and international organizations stepping in to deliver social services, both legitimacy and capacity come from outside. Because "autonomous recovery is the only form of state-building that combines domestic sources of legitimacy and capacity in the construction of functional governments" (2005, 26), Weinstein believes that it should be considered next to other state-building options.

Meanwhile, several questions can be raised or objections made to Weinstein's proposal for autonomous recovery. First of all there is his functionalist outlook on war-making. It seems important to carefully reflect on this apparent need for war and conflict to reach stability and functioning societal structures. At the same time, however, Weinstein's analysis of the beneficial elements of war-making remain very useful and insightful, as it essentially speaks about self-reliance, an attribute that in itself transcends the need for war-making. Other situations that endanger the survival of a group, like natural disasters and drought, come to mind, not as desirable events, but as situations from which – from an 'autonomous recovery' point of view – peoples are expected to come out stronger as a group if building on both material and financial self-reliance leading to successful organization of society. The late Claude Ake, a political theorist on African democracy and statehood, explicitly calls for self-reliance in Africa as a precondition for development and even democracy, and defines it concretely as a detachment from the dependency ties

with entities like the World Bank and the IMF (1996; in Bradley 2005, 423).

The second objection is more serious and concerns Weinstein's recommendation to support the strongest and most likely victorious party in a conflict. This call is problematic because it runs counter to his own democratic insight from autonomous recovery, namely that conflicts played out in a context with limited access to external support will (i) eventually end due to limited resources and war-tiredness and (ii) force the parties to seek popular support for their cause, thus building local rather than external legitimacy.

Finally, a general concern one could have with the autonomous recovery framework is the fact that it is unlikely to materialize in the short-term as a conscious policy choice in the current global context because of issues related to power and control and because of public opinion's cultivated views on appropriate ethical action in the face of human suffering. With regard to the former, in line with Chandler's and Merlingen's understanding of the power that resides in contemporary ethical foreign policy, Weinstein remarks that outside actors might have a problem with autonomous recovery because it offers little or no control over the shape of the government likely to come out of it (2005, 29). Indeed, ethical foreign policy comes with a well-defined agenda, based on western understandings of well-being, mirroring (idealised versions of) its own experiences in democratic state-formation. This results in what African democracy theorist Cyril Obi (2008, 8) calls "a process of universal homogenisation" while Merlingen cautions for the "homogenizing temptation in peacebuilding and the disciplines mobilized in its pursuit" (2006, 5). When it comes to public opinion, autonomous recovery's support for letting wars and conflicts run their course, seems to go against contemporary sentiments on care and human security. In the same way that Paris and Sisk dismiss the retreat option by stating that retreating from the post-war state-building project would be "tantamount to abandoning tens of millions of people to lawlessness, predation, disease and fear" (2009,

14), autonomous recovery does not seem to give an adequate short term answer to public opinion's desire to extend a meaningful hand in cases of grave human suffering.

Ironically, this dissonance with common sentiments on international care is probably the most valuable point in Weinstein's stance on autonomous recovery to the concept of ethical retreat. Apart from tying international absence to long term stability, peace and the emergence of functioning institutions, he most strikingly draws our attention to one of the more problematic assumptions in contemporary western ethical foreign policy and public opinion's common sense alike: the assumption that at the end of the day, non-western actors are not capable of emerging from an internal crisis on their own, while conversely outside intervention "in the form of mediation, peacemaking, and peacekeeping – is a necessary, if not key, instrument for reversing the political and economic decline of poorly governed states" (Weinstein 2005, 4). This constitutes a *de facto* bifurcation (Mamdani 2010) of the world's peoples into those that are capable of helping themselves, and those that are not – the basis of inequality and domination in contemporary western ethical foreign policy, an issue we consider below.

III. INEQUALITY AND HOMOGENY: 'NO CHOICE BUT DEMOCRACY'[8]

Others with Weinstein have noticed the *de facto* division that ethically inspired foreign policy imposes on the world's populations, individuals and states. On the one hand, there are those who are able and have agency, and on the other, those who do not have it (yet). Either their situation is so dire that their capacity or agency is not even part of the debate, or their citizenship and agency is recognized in theory but projected into the future, one they reach after having been capacity-built into voicing and making the right choices. In the context of peace-building and state-building, the bifurcation takes place both at the level of the individual and the state. At the state level it is most clearly perceived

through the shifts in the meaning of sovereignty in the context of human-itarian interventions and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Chandler insightfully describes the frontal attack on state sovereignty, and perhaps the sovereignty of the non-western subject in general, by turning to one of the most ardent advocates of R2P, Mary Kaldor:

> Kaldor draws a moral distinction where old wars are rational, constitu-tive of a collective or public interest and politically legitimate, whereas new wars are understood to be irrational, driven by private interest and politically illegitimate. This moral divide then enables Kaldor to argue that illegitimate political representatives have no right to hide behind the protections of sovereignty and that external peacekeeping interven-tion is morally necessary and legitimate, casting international interven-ers as interest-free enforcers of emerging international legal norms rather than as undermining international law. It is the cultural and moral divide that discursively facilitates and reflects the shifting prac-tices of external intervention, recasting the rights of sovereignty as conditional upon external judgement (2010, 376).

Whereas state sovereignty and the linked concept of non-interference used to be the central organizing principle in international relations, today sovereignty is conceived as a capacity, an attribute that needs to be earned.[9] States that are not seen as capable of protecting their own citi-zens or providing them with the necessary minimum subsistence services, do not have sovereignty, thus opening the avenues for other sovereign actors to offer assistance towards said sovereignty. While developed in the context of extreme and massive human suffering such as genocide and mass atrocities, there is a growing focus today on prevention. As a result, the agenda of long-term state-building efforts has been dragged into the debate and the practice of R2P. The bifurcating element lies in the fact that this state of lacking is something that is only detected in the non-western nations, while at the same time the lacking is being defined in the west. On the individual level, the bifurcation manifests itself through the partial presentation of the southern subject as a victim, and

only that, or by limiting said subject's capacity to help him or herself to the future, following a process of capacity building by the intervener. The same language of R2P therefore does not only affect the non-west at the state level, but also at the individual level, and this, according to African and international politics scholar Mahmood Mamdani, through humanitarianism. "The language of humanitarian intervention", Mamdani argues, "has cut its ties with the language of citizen rights. […] The new language refers to its subjects not as bearers of rights – and thus active agents in their own emancipation – but as passive beneficiaries of an external 'responsibility to protect'" (2010, 54-55).

A similar process of partial presentation and incapacitation of subjects has been raised by African American scholars[10] in their experience of being black in America. Cornel West speaks of a state of "perpetual and inheritable domination that diasporan Africans had at birth [producing] the modern black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness. White-supremacist assaults on black intelligence, ability, beauty and character required persistent black efforts to hold self-doubt, self-contempt and even self-hatred at bay" (1999, 128). Postcolonial scholars have drawn our attention to the subalterns and their (in)capacity to speak or be heard in the civilizing aid context (e.g. Spivak 1988 and Kapoor 2006). Critical peace-building and state-building scholar David Chandler traces this process of differentiation in the north-south engagement throughout the last century by contending that not much has changed, only the lens through which we perceive difference. Whereas in colonial times it was understood through racial difference, in later decades it was replaced by cultural difference, while today the gaze is on the individual in society legitimizing civil society intervention to shape those individuals' preferences. The differentiation lies in the fact that "peacebuilding policy interventions […] assume a cultural and moral divide between the post-colonial subject and the liberal democratic subject of the West" while at the same time "the liberal democratic tradition argues that social conflicts can be resolved through rational deliberation and societal engagement", the

assumption being that in the non-western world "civil society lacks the rational or civic qualities of civil society in the West" (Chandler 2010, 382-384).

At this point it is important to underline that it is not so much the differentiation between peoples and societies that is at the heart of the problematic of contemporary western ethical foreign policy, but the hierarchical interpretation of this difference. Simply noticing difference is not a sufficient condition to intervene. If inferiority, lacking, incapacity or unwillingness is linked to this difference, interference and outside action not only becomes conceivable, but framed in an ethical discourse, a necessary moral imperative. Michael Merlingen finds in this regard that "a narration of abnormality […] is constitutive of any project of improvement, however noble its intent" (2006, 22).

The hierarchical interpretation of difference is problematic because, apart from dividing the world into victims and saviours, it has a homogenizing effect on the content of the ethical agenda and in turn also on those who are considered the indispensible principle actors in its realization. The homogenized ethical agenda mirrors, or is inspired by, western experiences and achievements accounting for the copy-paste tendencies in western contemporary ethical foreign policy (Rutazibwa 2010). As a consequence, western involvement is projected as both logical and necessary. Given the changing nature of western societies and consensus on the details of the good-life, and given that the proposed agenda often does not match the needs or priorities of the receivers and therefore fails to take root, the need for western intervention is moreover consolidated in time.

A look at the specific case of democracy promotion in ethical foreign policy demonstrates how Weinstein's autonomous recovery insights transcend the war and conflict framework and how the problematics of homogeny and hierarchy are tied to both failure of and domination in policies that are supposed to contribute to the wellbeing of the 'others'. Democracy promotion is, next to R2P in instances of great and acute

human suffering, another central element in contemporary western ethical foreign policy. It is based on the belief that democracy is the best possible form of organisation and government of society. In the scholarly world, this conviction has been voiced through the 'Democratic Peace Thesis' (DPT). In its dyadic form, the DPT contends that democracies are less likely to fight each other (Chan 1997, 59), whereas its monadic version claims that democracies are all together less war prone (Chan 1997, 61). In spite of a vast literature dissecting the strengths and weaknesses of the DPT, it is nevertheless considered the closest to an "empirical law" (Henderson 2009, 58) in social sciences, and therefore serves as a strong basis, implicitly or explicitly, in the promotion of democracy abroad (Acuto 2008, 465). Meanwhile the details of what democracy (should) stand(s) for continue to be highly contested (Acuto 2008, 464), even in the western domestic context. At the same time, there seems to be a consensus in abstract terms on its core meaning, namely that it is linked to the "degree to which those affected by [policies] have been included in the decision-making processes and have had the opportunity to influence the outcomes" (Young 2000, 6). In the same way that international solidarity in instances of great human suffering is never fundamentally contested, neither is the idea that democracy could well be the best form of government (Adebanwi and Obadare 2011, 314). Contestations are linked rather to its concrete form and who gets to make this decision in the first place.

Contemporary ethical foreign policy promotes western style multiparty electoral liberal democracy using varying degrees of coercion, one of which is recognition. "Procedurally and substantively, Africans have been told by the Western world that democracy must fall within a particular paradigm if they truly and sincerely want to be considered democratic" (Bradley 2005, 410). Scholars on African democracy[11] have pointed to the fact that the promotion of this multiparty liberal democracy first of all consolidates the need for western actors to be involved and secondly that it has not brought true democracy to the continent as the

western style democracy does not fit the African reality (Ake 1993, 240). Western style democracy is seen to disempower (Ake 2000) or abrogate (Adebanwi and Obadare 2011, 313) the electorate, as it mostly has been busy with consolidating the power of the sitting political elites (the 'selectorate' [Adebanwi and Obadare 2011]) rather than really listening to the needs of the electorate.

Looking at the state of democracy in the nineties on the African continent, Claude Ake finds a sharp distinction with the western take on democracy, seeing that the former are mostly concerned with their economic rights, rather than their political rights to formally participate, which he sees as an individual "occasional opportunity to choose, affirm or dissent" (1993, 243). In this respect, Ake (1991) advances an important challenge, namely that we as researchers have to consider that "the primary issue [is] not whether it is more important to eat than to vote, but who is entitled to decide which is more significant" (Bradley 2005, 421). Echoing Young's definition of democratic legitimacy, Ake argues that for democracy to be meaningful in Africa it "must be shaped by the singular reality that those whose democratic participation is at issue" (1993, 244). He sees these people as having a different life experience than the western subjects in whose image the liberal market democracy has been shaped. "Of the ordinary people of Africa many are illiterate, and almost all are poor, rural dwellers in an essentially pre-industrial and communal society" (Ake 1993, 244). The version of democracy that is fitting for them will, according to Ake, be quite different from the contemporary version of liberal democracy. Well aware that there is little space internationally for fundamentally different forms of democracy, Ake adds that this African democracy will be "different enough to elicit suspicion and even hostility from the international community that currently supports African democratization" (1993, 244).

African and international politics scholar Arowosegbe's observation that "the disposition and legacy of western scholarship on the state universalizes a particular cultural construction of state–society relations in which

specific notions of civil society and statehood are conjoined and epistemologically asserted on the rest of the world through the projection of the western gaze as the exclusive perspective of power" (2011, 665), is to a large extent in line with what critical democracy theorist Iris M. Young understands as domination. For Young: "persons live within structures of domination if other persons or groups can determine without reciprocation the conditions of their action, either directly or by virtue of the structural consequences of their actions" (2000, 32). We have seen that in contemporary western ethical foreign policy, both in terms of R2P and democracy promotion, domination is enacted through a process of hierarchy and homogeny, both through a liberal and pastorate projection of power. Assuming that power is not something that is given up freely, Claude Ake calls on Africans to acknowledge the need for self-reliance and self-realization based on self-confidence. He considers the lack of this last attribute as "Africa's greatest obstacle to development" (Bradley 2005, 423).

The question at this point is whether we can conceptualise and concretise forms of ethical involvement for outside actors that avoid domination. If we were to embrace ethical foreign policy that is not based on a homogenization of the agenda or a classification of the world into the capable and the incapable or unwilling, what type of ethical engagement would we end up with? Does the autonomous recovery framework not suggest that external actors, especially when they have access to considerable means and power, are at best obsolete but most likely damaging to any effort to sustainable and democratic reconstruction or development? At the same time we are still faced with the unlikelihood that ethical retreat will spontaneously be espoused in international relations any time soon, for both power and influence reasons as well as public opinion. In this context, there is, even in radical theory formation, an imperative to consider other policy options that take into account the beneficial features of ethical retreat or constructively counter the current problematics in contemporary ethical foreign policy of domination through inequality and homogeny.

For Arowosegbe, the international community should make more effort to understand "the operations of governance structures in Africa and other non-western societies" (2011, 669). To him "the most effective option for the autochthonous transformation of the state in Africa lies in a convergence between international interventionism and these indigenous institutions" (2011, 669). Between the pastorate and liberal strand, Merlingen sees a solution in reinforcing the latter in peace-building practices, while also calling researchers to engage in an ethically reinforced governmentality theory that allows for an "immanent critique of peace-building. It allows researchers first to identify if there is too much government in a particular regime of peacebuilding and, second, to develop a more laissez-faire approach that is responsive to the subaltern demand for a future constructed in its own vernacular image" (Merlingen 2006, 3). It is unlikely though that this light form of 'stepping aside' via the idea of laissez-faire is sufficient to avoid the entrapments of domination, especially in the case of Africa where western peace-building efforts occur in a context of both material inequality, highly pastorate relations building on a history of sharp inequality in both realms. As for the salience of the liberal strand of ethical engagement, we do not exclude the fact that in the long run, it might not – given that it is built on a language of emancipation and self-determination and provided that it is used at face value by the local actors – eventually fundamentally alter the face of ethical engagement and the content of the agenda. It is not a given, however, and the way it is played out today, it seems rather unlikely in the short term. What is promoted as self-determination and ownership is in reality merely a form of self-management of a pre-set agenda. Calls like that of Arowosegbe, for the international community to acquire a better knowledge and understanding of the non-western reality, do not address how we should prevent this knowledge from being used, as has happened in the past while continuing today, to more intimately interfere in receiving societies as exemplified by Chandler's account of the liberal micro-managing approach in the current civil society approach.

Another body of literature calls for the further development of better global governance based on universal principles of human rights, a view shared by critical democracy scholars like Iris M. Young. While she warns against homogenization and the dangers of domination in the cosmopolitan call for global governance (2000, 236), she rejects the idea of retreat through her understanding of non-interference. For Young, self-determination should not be about non-interference, but about non-domination (2000, 237) and "the cure is rather to establish strong global regulatory institutions concerning human rights the formulation of whose policies should involve all the world's people" (Young 2000, 264). It is not clear at all, however, how the organization of the world's people in regulatory institutions is going to escape the contemporary stark power inequality amongst the participants from which any initiative will start. Are the life experiences of the world's people not too different to organize the concretization of the good life at a global level? At the domestic level, Young is very aware that such an enterprise might reinforce rather than diminish domination and exclusion in a domestic majority democracy set up, yet for peoples abroad she nevertheless ends up with a call for global governance. In what follows, therefore, we turn to her domestic insights on democracy, participation and inequality, and see to what extent they can be useful for ethical international interaction.

IV. POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE: THE RIGHT TO BE EQUAL AND DIFFERENT

When developing her democratic theory, Young pays a great deal of attention to issues of structural inequality to which ethnic minorities, women or poor, might be subjected. She refers to reflecting on a democratic model as a "democratic practice under condition of structural inequality" (2000, 4), recalling the problems of hierarchy and homogeny in contemporary ethical foreign policy and how they systematically hinder the people concerned in their realization of a society premised on their own vernacular image and subject them to arbitrary policy interventions

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with little access to alter or oppose. This results in a governance model that does not address their needs and priorities. Nor is it farfetched to consider reflections on democracy promotion in the ethical international arena as a similar "democratic practice under condition of structural inequality." In this sense it might be useful to investigate to what extent the politics of difference, which Young proposes to tackle structural inequality in the domestic sphere, can be a useful approach for ethical foreign policy practices. In contrast to her call for global governance in the international realm, when speaking about democracy at a domestic level Young acknowledges that "oppressions and wrongful inequalities take many forms, and appeals to a common good do not adequately respond to and notice such differences" (2000, 81). Even when one tries to formally include all the players through deliberation, "to the extent that norms of deliberation implicitly value certain styles of expression as dispassionate, orderly, or articulate, they can have exclusionary implications" (2000, 7). Young thinks that attention to social group position can be a resource for democratic communication that aims at justice (2000, 82). The challenge lies in identifying the useful 'group' distinction to obtain the same result in an ethical foreign policy setting, as in the relation between intervener and receiver.

The idea behind politics of difference is that by acknowledging diversity explicitly, corrective measures can be taken so that underprivileged categories in society are given a chance to fully participate in their own societies. The assumption is that current power relations will not automatically fade out and that a conscious intervention to that effect is necessary to break the perpetuation of structural inequality.[12] Politics of difference can focus on institutionalized forms of participation through quota systems (actors) or other mechanisms that ensure that the interests of marginalized groups appear on the policy agenda (content). African American scholarship on political participation has thus been dealing with the following central question: "what are the appropriate mechanisms to ensure that racial minorities will have an adequate voice in the

decision-making process?" (Whitby 2007, 195). Following a categorization by Hanna Pitkin in her 1967 book *The Concept of Representation*, African American politics scholar Whitby distinguishes between three dimensions of representation. First, he mentions the 'descriptive' dimension, referring to the fact that those who serve in legislative assemblies ought to reflect the social diversity of the country's population. For Pitkin, this is a passive form of representation because it focuses on being, rather than on doing something. Secondly, there is the 'substantive' form of representation, referring to a system in which acting in the interest of the represented is central. As it is feared that the majority voting system does not protect minority interests, some have in this respect advocated for special measures, such as minority veto power on issues of primary interest to the African American community (Lani Guinier, in Whitby 2007, 205). Finally, there is the 'symbolic' representation, and this refers to "the extent to which a representative is accepted as believable by his or her constituents" (Whitby 2007, 196-197). The value of this politics of difference framework is that it presents a different way to evaluate an ethical foreign policy relation, one in which the receivers and their democratic rights to meaningfully participate in their own society are central.

At this point it is important to be wary about the essentialist dangers embedded in the politics of difference. Young counters this concern by understanding groups in a relational way and not as fixed categories.[13] Cornel West[14] touches upon it when he describes the different reactions that have followed the lack of power and ensuing namelessness and invisibility of the African Americans and Africans in general. The essentialist approach has been to recast a positive image of Africans to counter the negative stereotypes, and show that they are as good as white people (assimilationist manner), in the same vein presenting all blacks as similar (homogenizing impulse; West 1999, 128). West notes how these strategies have been utilized by African elites on the continent to suppress diversity and to rule their masses (1999, 130). Yet, while critical state-building scholar David Chandler has drawn attention to the fact that perceived

cultural differences have been used as a pretext for external intervention, much of African state and democracy theorist Claude Ake's work has insisted on the fundamental difference between the African way of life and society, as a ground for refusing interference. For Ake, Africans should be able to develop economically and politically on their own accord and based on their own values (Bradley 2005, 423 based on Ake 1996), convinced that their democracy would have to be "radically different from liberal democracy" (Ake 1993, 241). While easily mistaken as an essentialist approach, Ake's call is at the same time in line with the democratic understanding of peoples' rights to organise life in their own vernacular image as formulated by Scott and Merlingen. Ake's insistence on the fact that many Africans are illiterate, living in a pre-industrial society and have a communal rather than a individual take on life, does not need to be seen necessarily as an essentialist description of the African being, but might also be an acknowledgement of their actual way of life. In this sense, Ake's work can be seen as call for a right to be different, rather than condemning Africans to be different. A call to be considered as equal in the present, rather than only in a more or less distant future after having been 'capacity-built'.

This can be the basis for a dynamic politics of difference, one that, in view of peoples' democratic right to build a society according to their own vernacular image, distinguishes between the legitimate actors and agendas on that basis. A democratic politics of difference would make a formal hierarchy of those actors that are entitled to influence and alter policies – be it through formal government structures or not – on the basis of the degree to which they are affected by it. According to Obi, "the challenge is not to tropicalise democracy, even if this temptation is perhaps overwhelming, but to return it to the basics, that is, when the people control power" (2008, 24). Rather than crystallizing difference in terms of ethnicity or some essentialist notion of 'Africaness', this version of the politics of difference is based more on experience and affect than on being. Moreover, apart from being essentially democratic, it is also

receptive to change given that a people's vernacular image is as dynamic and in flux as people are.

V. CONCLUSION

In this contribution we have been inspired by the problematics of homogeny and hierarchy in contemporary western ethical foreign policy, and have presented two frameworks to contribute to the 'first-do-no-harm' principle in the study of ethical foreign policy, by advancing the idea of ethical retreat. First, by turning to Weinstein's ideas on 'autonomous recovery', second by looking into the principles of the 'politics of difference'. The autonomous recovery framework addressed how the international community might not be a natural or necessary element in a country's search for peace and stability, and might also be an impediment to the construction, restoration or conservation of democratic governance to a people's vernacular image, especially if financial and other forms of support cut the ties between political elites and their populations. This raises serious questions about the salience of even 'no-strings-attached' financial aid and is a call to reconsider how financial aid can be organised in such a way that the damage is minimal. The politics of difference in ethical foreign policy steers us then towards a classification of legitimacy of all the actors involved, ranging from the locals over the mobile elites to the even more mobile diaspora, to end with the international community, organised in a hierarchy on the basis of the level in which they are affected by policies and tied to the local context. By default the international actors end up at the very bottom of this democratic politics of difference pyramid. The challenge lies in the reformulation of the international actors' role in this approach.

Our approach to global ethics has aimed at addressing the highly unethical or counter-productive elements in contemporary ethical foreign policy practices and assumptions. The challenge for practitioners and scholars alike is to integrate these considerations more systematically

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while assessing ethical foreign policy. One helpful instrument is to reach back to the essential understanding of democracy, without essentialising or tropicalising it while dealing with the 'other'. Furthermore, ethical foreign policy in our contemporary globalized world calls for a more bold engagement with the issue of difference and differentiation. In this paper we have tried to do this by pointing at the damaging effect of a hierarchical differentiation while on the other hand calling for the democratic right to be different in the present. The challenge is to find a balance in this in practice. Academically, this means a need for pluralism in the scholarly traditions used to address and understand ethics and issues of difference. We have done this by turning to the domestic literature of African American experience and democracy in Africa to inform the international level. Finally, reflection on ethical foreign policy should find ways to part with the desire to stay involved at any cost and instead truly put the well-being of the 'others' at the centre of the reflection, thus meaningfully distinguish between ethical and regular foreign policy.

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NOTES

1. See also Scott 1995.

2. Other approaches on ethical foreign policy focus more on the principled ideas or norms, such as human rights, good governance and democracy that guide foreign policy decisions, and see in it a projection of a certain ideology and identity into the wider world (Khaliq 2008). Michael Merlingen, referring to Andrew Linklater, sees in it a global or international "civilizing process […] concerned with reducing cruelty in world affairs […] widening emotional identification to include the members of the other societies" (2006, 2; citing Linklater 2005, 381).

3. They summarize them in the following five contradictions: (i) outside intervention is used to foster self-government; (ii) international control is required to establish local ownership; (iii) universal values are promoted as a remedy for local problems; (iv) statebuilding requires both a clean break with the past and a reaffirmation of history; and (v) short term imperatives often conflict with longer-term objectives (Paris and Sisk 2009, 305-306).

4. Chandler refers to Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff, Ramesh Takur, Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk.

5. The new idea that came out of the London Conference for Somalia on February 23rd 2012 to set up a Joint Financial Management Board comprising Somali government officials and international donors and diplomats to manage Somali tax revenues and aid money, could be seen as a development in that direction.

6. See Rutazibwa's (2010) treatment of the intervener-centric mechanism.

7. Both the south-central parts of the country and the more independent regions such as Somaliland and Puntland.

8. Obi 2008

9. For an extensive treatment of the concept of sovereignty in statebuilding see, for example, Dominik Zaum, *The Sovereignty Paradox: The Norms and Politics of International Statebuilding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

10. See, for example, the works of Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson, bell hooks, W.E.B. du Bois.

11. Eyoh divides the debate amongst African scholars on African democracy into three categories: 'universalists', 'nativists' and the 'popular democratic' (1998, 288). The first are most in line with the western take on liberal democracy and put the multiparty electoral system to the fore as the core elements of democracy. Universalists like Jibrin Ibrahim and Peter Anyang'Nyong'o place, according to Eyoh, just like their western counterparts, a considerable amount of importance on the procedural elements of democracy (1998, 289-290). Whereas Adebanwi and Obadare might follow Schmitter and Karl's warning that focusing on elections alone to evaluate the democratic state of a country amounts to a procedural fallacy of electoralism, Adebanwi and Obadare nevertheless insist that "regular, competitive, free and fair elections, representing the sovereign views of the citizens in any polity, constitute a fundamental criterion, indeed, sine qua non, in the evaluation of democratization and democracy" (Adebanwi and Obadare 2011, 312). Meanwhile their argument goes on that it is important to hold on to elections, even if at present they are being used to abrogate the rights of the electorate. Popular democrats, such as Mahmood Mamdani and Issa Shivji, are cautious to conflate democracy with multipartyism and government accountability (Eyoh 1998, 291). For the nativist perspective, Eyoh turns to Claude Ake and Maxwell Owusu, a perspective that shares many of the concerns of the popular democrats, with the particularity that the nativists are convinced that "rural societies remain repositories of democratic values from which to build culturally germane, participatory forms of democracy at the nation-state level" (Eyoh, 1998, 294). Bradley, building on the works of Claude Ake, points at the element communalism in what he calls "African-style democracy" (2005, 410). Other features of this African democracy are non-partyism (2005, 411) and chieftaincy (2005, 412).

12. Structural oppression is tackled in Young's account through Marlyn Frye's analogy of the bird cage. If one were to explain the reason why a bird cannot fly away in a birdcage by looking at it wire by wire, it would be hard to understand why the bird was not free to go. "Only a large number of wires arranged in a specific way and connected to one another to enclose the bird and to reinforce one another's rigidity can explain why the bird is unable to fly freely" (Young 2000, 92-3).

13. Young refers to Larry May (1988, 1994) to specify the meaning of this relational logic: "any group consists in a collective of individuals who stand in determinate relations with one another because of the actions and interactions of both those associated with the group and those outside or at the margins of the group" (2000, 89). And: "What makes a group a group is less a set attributes its members share than the relations in which they stand to others" (2000, 90).

14. McPhail, in line with his reading of Martin Luther King's rhetoric, mentions African American scholars like Michael Eric Dyson, bell hooks and Cornel West as people who "articulate critical projects that celebrate and value the emancipatory impulses of African American thought and culture while at the same time interrogating the epistemological limitations of essentialized notions of racial 'unity' and 'authenticity'" (McPhail 2002, 80).