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Introduction, *Special Issue* 'Development, Democracy and Culture'

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Article Information

Abstract

In a time of huge religious, political and territorial conflict, the *cultural* dimension of development is all too easily ignored. The last special issue of the *Journal of Law, Social Justice and Global Development* was concerned with Cultural Rights (culture and human rights); this current issue, thematically, follows from a question that emerged in the process of its editing: How have global cultural policies been conceived as development policies through a quest for the 'ideal' of democracy? The 2001 UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, and then the 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, appealed to the values of democracy as a 'basis' of their operational efficacy. But what kind of democracy is most effective in the implementation of cultural policies, and how that that re-adjust our thinking on the role of culture in development? What happened to the discourse on *democracy and development* that featured milestone texts like the World Commission on Culture and Development's *Our Creative Diversity* (1966)? What happened to the notion that cultural pluralism was a road to democratisation, and why do policies on multiculturalism no longer seem to promise a vibrant participatory "culture" of democracy for the brave new "globalised" world? These questions cannot be decisively answered, but the articles in this issue serve to frame our investigation moving forward to a substantive response.

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Of the several academic events and intellectual encounters that were responsible for the theme of this special issue, we will only name one, where John Clammer was a visiting international fellow at the Warwick University Institute of Advanced Study during the summer of 2018. It was during this time we collaborated on many seminars, some of which were generously sponsored by the Warwick Research Priority in International Development (now the Warwick Institute of Interdisciplinary Research in International Development, the prime sponsor of this journal). One of the sponsored seminars concerned the continued significance of UNESCO's discourse on 'Culture and Development'. It discussed how that discourse (principally, on the relation between culture, democratisation and development) continues, but, has become of secondary importance to the principle subject of the UN 2005 Convention — diversity and intercultural relations through creative economy and its spectrum of supporting policies.

While the 2005 Convention had its origins in the admirable political motivation (largely on the part of France and Canada) to protect cultural production from the increasingly liberalised global economy, it nonetheless contributed to a re-framing of global cultural policy with reference to the UNCTAD-devised [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development] framework of Creative Economy. While it would be wrong to assert that culture and development policies were henceforth displaced by more specific policy aspirations for the creative industries — indeed, the 2005 Convention foregrounds interculturalism and international cooperation — it does mean that the growing recognition of the interrelation of culture and democracy is no longer central to UNESCO (as it was at the time of the Convention's origins in the 2001 UNESCO *Declaration on Cultural Diversity*). Indeed, it is no longer central to the many strategic international cultural relations organisations (like the British Council), to NGOs, to city authorities (such as Creative City projects), or to the UNDP (United Nations Development Project). And this has many implications, notably for the stunted intellectual project of 'pluralism' (central to UNESCO's

landmark 1996 Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development (now dissolved), *Our Creative Diversity*; the 1999 publication of *Towards a Constructive Pluralism* (UNESCO, 1999), and Boutros Boutros-Ghali's edited book-length report *The Interaction between Democracy and Development* (UNESCO, 2002)). A primary implication, we would argue, is the decreasing international profile of cultural policy itself — as a necessary component of any socially-informed and sustainable approach to development. Cultural policies have tended to become supplementary to creative industries, economy or urban development policies. This, unfortunately, lessens the urgency of the recognition of *rights* in the realm of culture, the capacity for inclusion and the cultivation of citizenship, along with political participation (of promoting the civic order and association, and of the quality of urban and public cultural life). Cultural policy, as a political enterprise, maintain a broader historical claim on the public realm and social life, which are arguably not intrinsic to economic or urban policies. Indeed, it is surely possible to implement most of the 2005 Convention without being troubled by the question of democracy itself, or the intrinsic role human freedom and expression in democratic life.

This Special Issue has, implicit within it, an aim to promote what one may refer to as a 'democratic culture', or a quality of cultural life (production, management, policy framing) that articulates the necessary conditions for both self and collective actualisation (or, in terms of a pluralist theory of democracy, the actualisation of the self through collective self-determination). The papers of this special issue are thus both broad-based and focused: they span cultural policy, sustainable development, creative economy, creative cities, contemporary art, civil society and cultural rights. When we invited the various contributors, we did so because of the way that each of their very different approaches to cultural research nonetheless encircled critical issues internal to the problem of democracy. And we define democracy as a problem, and not simply an object of analysis, a theory of government, or a self-evident and ethically superior way of organising society. As we have witnessed in the UK, throughout Europe and

the world, the rise of populists claiming to represent the authentic will of the people, has thrown into some disarray established and normative notions on democracy we have taken for granted (indeed, since the post-Second World War settlement that saw the rise of the UN system and its institutions).

The word 'democracy' naturally conjures up images of the ballot box, and of the relatively representative political forms and institutions of Western Europe, North America, Australasia, Japan and other societies that have followed a basically liberal model of governance such as India. The concept tends, in other words, to be read as a broad political one, without much reference to either its sociological or cultural underpinnings, expressions and manifestations. India, which likes to bill itself as 'the world's largest democracy', does indeed have the institutional forms of that political system – regular elections, a bicameral parliament, state assemblies and forms of democratic participation penetrating down to the lowest level of political organization – the panchayat or village level assemblies. In practice, however, this ideal-type model is distorted by factors of caste, communalism (often religiously based), regionalism (for example in Kashmir and in many parts of the Northeast of the country, which barely consider themselves to be part of India at all. A similar argument could be made of other formally democratic political systems – Japan for example, or Singapore, where local and cultural readings of 'democracy' take on a distinctive style. But while the term itself is open to a variety of interpretations, the notion of democracy is nevertheless held up as the best of all political arrangements, and certainly a great advance on feudal, monarchical, authoritarian or totalitarian alternatives. One profound reason for this is its association with human rights: the belief, which substantial empirical evidence supports, that it is only within the context of a democratic (and hopefully responsible, transparent and representative) regime, that human rights can be protected and realized.

But at the same time, a growing chorus of voices have been suggesting that none of our existing political systems is actually effective either in delivering those promised goods to all citizens (or non-citizens for that matter) or incorporating all the members of society, including ethnic and religious minorities, into a genuinely representative and egalitarian polity, or in addressing the all too apparent global issues that are pressing upon us regardless of nationality: global warming and climate change, conflicts and terrorism, pollution of the air and oceans, dangerous loss of biodiversity, and other issues that threaten the viability of life on Earth as a whole. Assuming that we have the intellectual and moral resources to address these problems, factors which must be expressed in political terms eventually, and that we can avoid the apocalypse if we have the will to do so, then the question of the relationships between democracy and what is conventionally called 'development' must necessarily arise.

There are here in fact a number of key issues. One of these is the rethinking of the concept of democracy itself and questioning whether the simple 'ballot box' model is what we need, or whether alternative forms of democratic life (quite possibly at very local as well as national levels) can be conceived that emphasize the very values on which original conceptions of democracy were based: the old values of liberty, equality and fraternity, together with genuine participation, the cultivation and protection of human rights, and, many would now argue, of the rights of nature and non-human species, and a broad conception of responsibilities rather than a culture of entitlements. Implicit in such a model of what might be thought of as 'genuine' democracy, necessarily participatory and in which all voices are heard, are questions of culture. Let us unpack this as it provides one of the key frames through which this special issue is organised.

We are familiar with the idea of 'political culture' – essentially the idea that any political form, however much it may represent itself as an example of an ideal-type that can even be represented in a diagram of the kind often used to show organizational structures in a graphic form – is in fact animated by cultural and sociological factors peculiar to its geographical and historical situation. Indeed, political sociology is largely

concerned with the discovery and elucidation of such factors. This is not unimportant – there are many local variations on the basic model of democracy, which very much influence the way it is practiced in reality. But it certainly does not exhaust the multiple relationships between culture and democracy, or of the even larger triangulation of culture, development and democracy, and these demand an elaboration in more detail.

Something of a 'chicken and egg' situation appears to obtain here. Or to put it in slightly less informal language, there is a complex linkage between the three terms. Democracy should ideally promote not only human rights, but also the flourishing of culture. The evidence on this, however, is mixed. In many democratic polities, the arts are under threat, not from some totalitarian fear of free expression, but by cuts to funding and public budgets. In the UK for example this is not only true of financial support for the arts in general, but is very conspicuous in savage cuts to library funding, many libraries having closed, been merged or taken over by voluntary workers in order to keep them open at all. Paradoxically, the glories of urban Vienna stem not from a benign democratic regime, but from the rather chaotic authoritarianism of the Hapsburg monarchy, which, for all its anti-democratic impulses, certainly encouraged good architecture, music and opera, and provided a remarkable environment for the flourishing of the visual arts. Contemporary Germany however, in both its eastern and western parts and their rather separate histories in the last half-century, has high levels of spending on the arts, and it is rare to find even a small German city without its university, orchestra and at least one public art gallery.

UNESCO has long been promoting the preservation and protection of culture and the maintaining of cultural diversity from the threats of globalisation, and, although it does not like to use the term, from the homogensing tendencies of international neoliberal capitalism (for which presumably read 'globalisation' in UNESCO-speak). The major declarations of the early years of the current century, and in particular the 2001 *Universal Declaration on Cultural* Diversity

(UNESCO 2001) and the subsequent expanded *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (UNESCO 2005), both of which link the preservation of culture to globalisation on the one hand, and equable development on the other (for a detailed commentary on the 2005 Convention see De Beukelaer, Pyykkönen and Singh 2015). In between, during the reign of Boutros Boutros-Ghali as Secretary-General of the United Nations, they also published his text *The Interaction Between Democracy and Development* (2002). In fact, quite a substantial book could be written on the numerous declarations of UNESCO, not only on the general principle of cultural preservation and presumably its encouragement, but also on specialised issues such as intangible cultural heritage, the creation of recognised sites of cultural importance, underwater heritage in the form of submerged archaeological sites and historically important ship wrecks, and more. Indefatigable in the issuing of declarations, the problem (other than UNESCOs rather fuzzy definitions of culture) is in persuading governments to actually abide by them and to carry into practice pro-active policies of cultural advancement. UNESCO itself has recognised the link between culture and development in its documentation and promotion of culture as a mechanism of poverty alleviation and economic uplift, as well as culture's intrinsic value (UNESCO/UNDP 2013).

It is certainly true that the promotion and protection of cultural diversity *is itself a form of* democracy – the encouraging of pluralism and multiple voices expressing themselves freely through a large range of cultural expressions. In the past at least, this optimistic view was often expressed by the concept of 'multiculturalism', a subject on which a vast amount of scholarly ink and political rhetoric has been expended. While some countries – Singapore being a conspicuous example (Chan and Siddique 2019) – have actively maintained the concept as an organising principle of their polity and society, many others have effectively withdrawn, as evidenced by the rise of populism in once-liberal Europe and elsewhere and often taking the form of anti-immigrant and anti-religious minorities sentiment. Cultural

democracy then is expressed in the form of cultural pluralism and freedom of expression. The link between cultural democracy and political democracy however is complex and the two are not necessarily related in any simple causal sense. Nor necessarily is the link between democracy and development. Indeed, as we have just cited Singapore as an example, the late and long-time prime minister of that country, Lee Kwan Yew, quite openly stated on a visit to the Philippines – a country with a lively if often contested sense of democracy and a very free press – that authoritarianism of the (then) Singapore variety was much better at promoting *development* than the open political system of his host (quite overlooking the very different histories and the rural nature of the Philippines and its strongly religious culture).

There are then no clear-cut answers to the questions of the relationships between culture, democracy and development. If this is a moving target, nevertheless the very nature of that fluidity pushes to the forefront of debate a number of key questions, some of which are addressed in this special number. Some are given more prominence than others, but a brief manifesto of these issues can certainly be set out, and this we will now endeavour to do.

If the nature of democracy, at least in its 'purer' forms, is linked to the question of human rights in a positive sense (democracy creates the context for human rights to be respected), the whole cultural diversity debate inevitably raises the question of cultural rights as an expression of genuine freedom to create and live whatever alternative lifestyles are desired (within the limits of the law, itself arrived at through debate and consensus). Such rights are rarely discussed in the context of human rights. Yvonne Donders has defined cultural rights as 'human rights that directly promote and protect cultural interests of individuals and communities and that are meant to advance their capacity to preserve, develop and change their cultural identity' (Donders 2015: 117). Such a definition relates quite naturally to the idea of cultural justice: the active enhancement and inviolable nature of cultural expressions and their embodiment in chosen

lifestyles, including in modes of relationship to nature (for an expanded discussion see Clammer, 2019). An important aspect of social justice is then freedom of cultural expression. This may relate to development in the more conventional approach taken by UNESCO and the UN Development Program in their promotion of cultural enterprises as vehicles for development (UNESCO/UNDP 2013), or in a much broader and imaginative way as defining the good life, the desired future and the freedom of artistic expression.

The triangulation of democracy, culture and development throws up many other issues – both descriptive and prescriptive ones. On the descriptive front, the matters around which this special issue are organised include democratising cultural policy and making of cultural resources available to large sections of the population, the relationships between cultural rights and human rights, the actual impact (if any) of the various UNESCO conventions and treaties on culture, and, in an environment where the term 'sustainability' has become a buzzword, the question of sustainable cultures, in the two senses of, one the one hand, contributing to other forms of environmental and economic sustainability (through the curbing of consumption or excess travel for example), and the encouragement of forms of culture which themselves can be sustained over long periods of time rather than as the fragmented and ephemeral forms of cultural production that are currently very prevalent.

At a prescriptive level, questions arise of how to guide cultural policy in the direction of greater democracy, participation and activity that contributes more effectively to the constructive role of the arts in addressing a range of issues, including the environmental and the political. Shannon Jackson has argued very effectively that 'When a political art discourse too often celebrates social disruption at the expense of social coordination, we lose a more complex sense of how art practices contribute to inter-dependent social imagining. Whether cast in aesthetic or social terms, freedom and expression are not opposed to obligation and care, but in fact depend upon each other' (Jackson 2011: 14). Somewhere in between the descriptive and the prescriptive, then, comes the identification of

areas of cultural studies that have for various reasons been occluded. While religious studies as a field flourishes within its own discursive space, the links between religion, cultural studies and development have not been explored in anything like enough detail. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out in their seminal study of postcolonial literature, the sacred in a world dominated by secularity, economic rationalism and progressivism has been relegated in many cases to the category of what Homi Bhabha (1994: 114) has called 'denied knowledges', while in fact it is related not only to the rise of fundamentalism, terrorism and other socially regressive manifestations, but equally 'debates about the sacred have become more urgent as issues such as land rights and rights to sacred beliefs and practices have begun to grow in importance' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989/2007: 212).

It might be argued, of course, that any just and sustainable process of development *must* be democratic, in the sense that people are consulted and their real and self-defined needs are addressed (and not just as some top-down plan conceived by outsiders sitting in offices in the World Bank or some major development agency). The proliferation of civil society organisations and the growth of the third sector illustrates the fact that in many cases it is not the state that acts in the people's interests, but those who find themselves forced or encouraged to take a stand on particular issues not addressed or addressed in inappropriate ways by governments and other formal (including development and aid) institutions. Furthermore, we would certainly argue, that at the core of any acceptable process of development has to be social justice — a situation in which human rights, cultural rights and the rights of nature are fully taken into account. This too, in a world where new issues are constantly being thrown up or intensified – the impact of globalisation on local cultures, migration, whether voluntary or forced by political and/or environmental factors, ageing societies in Japan, much of Europe, Singapore and elsewhere, digitalization and the so-called 'new economy' with its multiple implications for work, employment and access, especially for the technologically deprived.

At the same time, debates continue about the universality of human rights, or the extent to which they may be rooted in culture, and hence contextualised rather than applying in a blanket way to all societies (An-Naim 1992, Bell, Nathan and Peleg 2001, Cowan, Dembour and Wilson 2001). An aspect of this debate is the question of the validity of indigenous forms of justice and rights-setting, such as the Adat customary law of Indonesia and Malaysia, or the status of Hindu law in India. In these and other similar cases more 'universal' conceptions of law and legal process have tended to drive out the long-established local varieties and, where they still exist have largely confined them to such areas as family law and local disputes. The existence and integrity of such systems also needs to be situated within debates about sustainable justice, democracy and development. It is of course also all-too possible to abuse such a position, and to argue as has been the case in a number of countries, that certain rights, even those enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, do not apply locally, and the small print in the appendices to such documents as the 2005 UNESCO Convention quietly show the dissenters who will accept most, but not all of such conventions and the Universal Declaration, especially when issues such as religious minorities, women, the LGBT community, or aboriginal communities are concerned.

New issues then constantly challenge the boundaries of conventional or established rights and culture thinking. Globalisation has thrown up questions of citizenship for example, and whether more cosmopolitan forms of identity can be evolved that are more congruent with what is in many other respects (media, MNCs, patterns of travel and communication) a borderless world. In the context of climate change, now surely one of the major collective global challenges, new forms of identity that transcend the old political boundaries of the nation state are perhaps required that reflect a larger sense of responsibility than the limited category of nationality (Davidson 2004). The question of TNCs themselves are corporate 'rights' are yet another area that requires close attention (Clammer, 2019: 35-52). While all these questions cannot be addressed in this one special issue, the range of

contributions reflect critically and constructively on many of these themes. Collectively they open up for further debate and action the issues discussed in this introduction, and hopefully they will represent not only substantial contributions in their own right, but act as a springboard to the range of existing and emerging themes that arise when the linkages between democracy, culture, development and justice are exposed to debate.

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