

Book Review: Global Democratic Theory: A Critical Introduction

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Global Democratic Theory analyses a number of theories related to democracy at different levels of government. Issues of representation of different civil society groups and government accountability are among the main themes. **Mehmet Kerem Coban** recommends the book “for all readers because we are all affected by ‘democratic deficits’ at various levels of the policy-making process.”

Global Democratic Theory : A Critical Introduction. Daniel Bray and Steven Slaughter. Wiley. 2015.

In the spring of 2012, I attended the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore held by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in Geneva.

The issue discussed was indigenous peoples’ argument that the income generated from traditional knowledge should accrue to them, not to domestic and/or global corporations. That is a problem of fair representation and accountability. How would indigenous peoples protect their traditional knowledge if the legal regime to be established did not favour them?

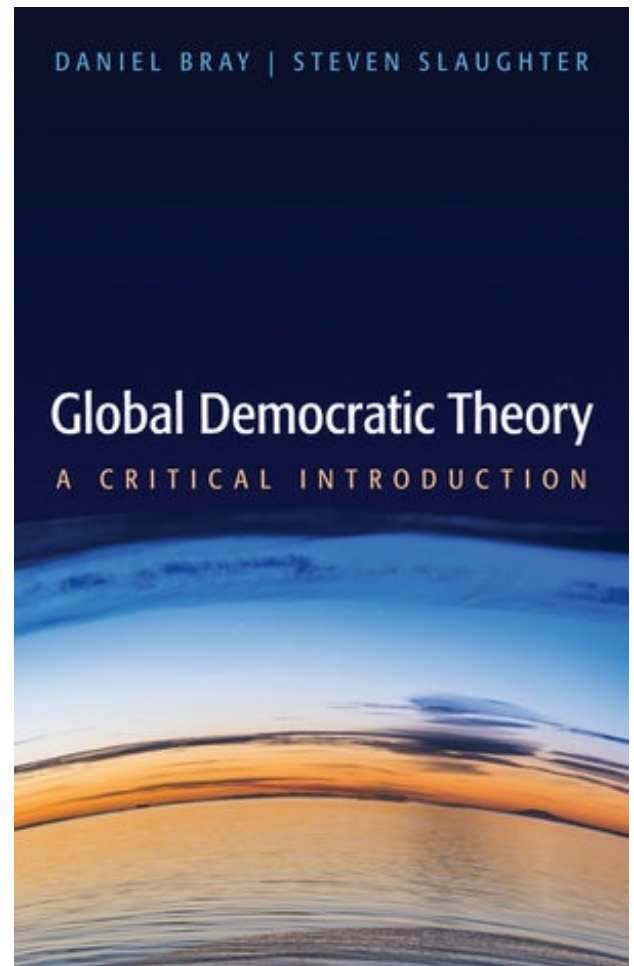
My experience is just one example in today’s world where policy-making has become more globalised, with both positive and negative externalities in our daily lives. Decisions made in Basel, Washington D.C., New York, London, and in other cities hosting international summits affect societies around the world to varying degrees and in different ways.

Global Democratic Theory is an easily accessible and short critical introduction to the subject. It informs us about various approaches to the theory of “democratic deficits” related to accountability and representation not only in State governments, but also at the regional and global levels. Globalisation impacts democracy at all three of them.

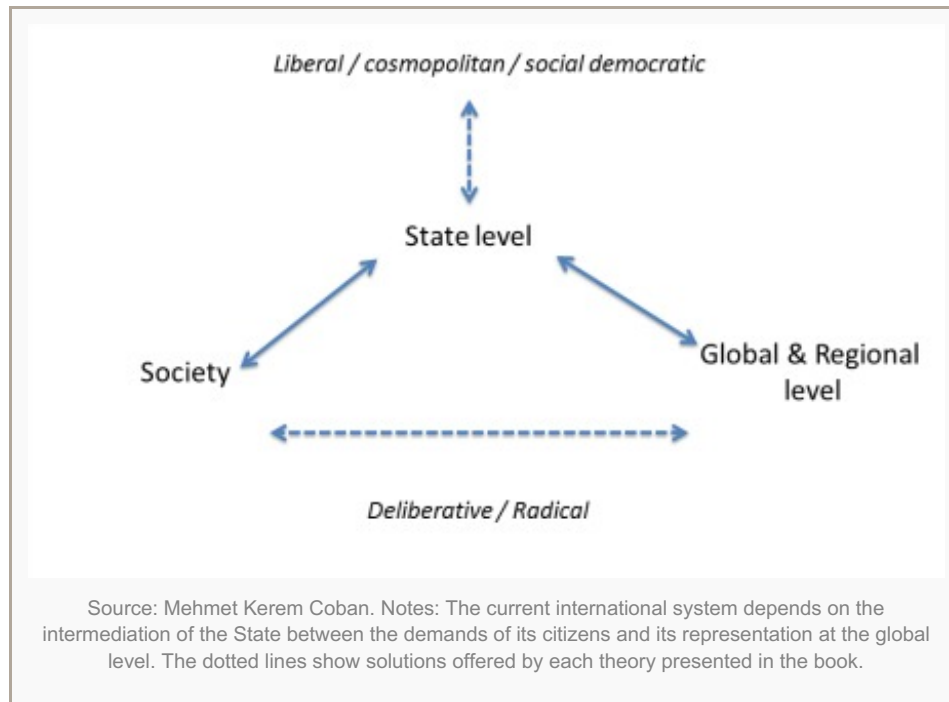
The authors present a spectrum of theories of global democracy. Liberal internationalism seeks to preserve the State while aiming to enhance democratic practice at the global level. Radical democracy aims to dismantle hierarchical forms of government and governance in a revolutionary manner. The other theories are cosmopolitan democracy, social democracy and deliberative democracy.

These theories are important in the discussion about how to develop better democratic systems at the global level in order to produce solutions to our common problems. Each of them presents solutions in light of their own theoretical and ideological understanding of how the world works.

I created the figure below to depict the summary of approaches the authors provide (pp. 150-151). It shows that the deliberative and radical democracy theories propose a democratic system that can bypass the State level in order to achieve accountability and representation at the global level. Liberal institutionalism, cosmopolitan democracy and



social democratic approaches maintain that the democratic practice first needs to develop within the State, and then extend beyond it.



This brings us to two crucial and interdependent questions which the authors also reflect in the book: 1) How can we improve democratic practice *within* the State?; and 2) How can we improve democracy at the global level, given its current level within States? Answers differ according to each theory, but the most pressing issue is the future of democracy within the State.

We may need the State for a higher degree of public participation due to its intermediation role in the global decision-making process, and if we need it, then how we can ensure citizens can have more say in that process? While all theories agree that the current global system is not accountable, giving more space to civil society may not guarantee more accountability. This is related to the role of civil society organisations.

As I noticed during the 21st IGC in Geneva, not everyone affected by policies has the wherewithal to mobilise (e.g. human and financial resources). Civil organisations claiming to represent *all affected* may not represent everyone they claim to speak on behalf of. Even governments in the politically developed part of world can neglect interests of their own indigenous populations in the name of conforming to the proposed international legal regime.

If the current State-led system were to be reformed as international institutionalism, cosmopolitan democracy and social democracy envision, it would be important to find out how different groups within a society can have their voices heard by their governments. Alternatively, if the current system were to be reformed to guarantee representation and accountability at the global level, we need to find ways to put into action what the radical and deliberative democracy theories suggest.



Representation and accountability are at the heart of these theories, and they are linked to another theme: transnational networks. As Bray and Slaughter mention in the book, it seems to me that the rise of unelected officials*, as part of a “shadow elite”** in transnational networks, is part of a difficult problem for any society in dealing with representation and accountability.

Global democracy in the sense that all citizens around the world can have a definite and effective footprint looks rather utopic. The danger of falling into a technocratic mode of governance is already the reality today. Whether one chooses the radical avenue or other softer proposals, the book authors remind us that we need to find feasible and appropriate ways to improve democratic practice at both the State and global levels.

Global Democratic Theory suggests some pressing issues we should focus on: transnational networks of formal officials, corporations, civil society and collective agents, participation and accountability. This book is recommended for all readers because we are *all affected* by ‘democratic deficits’ at various levels of the policy-making process.

* Roberts, Alasdair. 2010. *The Logic of Discipline: Global Capitalism and the Architecture of Government*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

** Wedel, Janine R. 2009. *The Shadow Elite : How the World's New Power Brokers Undermine Democracy, Government, and the Free Market*. New York: Basic Books.

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