



## *Maitreyee*

Briefing of the Human Development and Capability Association  
Number 4, February 2006

Dear HDCA Members,

The establishment of democratic institutions is rightly recognized as a distinguishing feature of social life in the past century. Yet, the essence of democracy—public debate—and its ability to promote human freedoms, often, remains a cherished goal. The Iraq war and attendant worldwide media and public protests, is a case in point. Some might see these events as a successful expression of democracies, where people made their voices heard with the hope of influencing the policy process. While, others might consider them as a failure of people to influence decisions that affect their lives and the lives of others. Yet, illustrations such as this abound in our midst. From villagers challenging pollution in China or tribals resisting 'development' and displacement in India to the recent victory for indigenous people in Bolivia, among countless others, these movements all tell us that we live in a time not for pessimism, vis-à-vis public debate, but one that urges cautious optimism.

In keeping with these times, this *Maitreyee* explores the fundamental role of public debate in promoting people's freedoms. Amartya Sen emphasises three such roles. The *intrinsic* value of public debate offers that by virtue of their humanity, people ought to have a say in decisions affecting their lives. The *instrumental* role offers that through public debate, societies collectively determine the ends that policy processes should promote. Public debate also helps to decide the means through which policy ends will be pursued. Finally, public debate is of *constructive* importance in defining and creating a broad understanding of the values that guide a society – such as, say, racial equality and religious pluralism.

Iris Marion Young argues that discussion is the only means that we have to discover what is to be done for promoting justice. However, such debate is often prone to the exclusion of marginal groups. She examines ways in which these groups can be included in the discussion process so that the outcomes of policy process might be more just. David Crocker analyzes the linkages between the capability approach and deliberative democracy theory and ways in which it can enrich the current under-theorization of public debate in the capability approach. Pablo Mella further develops this theme by discussing the new perspective that Habermas's theory of communicative action can bring to human development. Since social movements are an embodiment of public debate, we present an interview with Smitu Kothari to better understand the contribution of social movements to public debate. Stephen Schwenke illustrates the case of the presidential elections in Uganda, where, despite the hope that social movements can bring, public debate still faces distinct challenges.

Our next *Maitreyee* will be a special issue on the *Human Development Reports* and will be edited in collaboration with the Human Development Report Office of the UNDP.

Séverine Deneulin and Manu V. Mathai  
Editors

E-mail: [s.deneulin@bath.ac.uk](mailto:s.deneulin@bath.ac.uk); [manu@udel.edu](mailto:manu@udel.edu)

## ***Public Debate and Social Justice***

**Iris Marion Young**  
**Political Science, University of Chicago**

How do we know what is just? Even if we were to agree on basic principles of justice, such as Rawls's two principles, or the ideals embedded in the capabilities approach to social justice, we would not know immediately how they should be instantiated in particular policies for particular situations. People have different opinions about which policies and practices best promote justice, and how to set priorities and manage trade-offs under circumstances where not everything good can be done at once. There are not philosopher kings among us who can adjudicate these debates, and if some people claim to be, we should distrust them. Must we then concede that in practice democratic processes cannot yield moral knowledge, but only the aggregate of the opinions of the greater number, or the most organized, or the most powerful?

In recent years theories coming under the label of deliberative democracy have offered a way of thinking about ideals of democratic process that need not understand its outcomes as epistemologically arbitrary. The theory of deliberative democracy says that normatively legitimate democratic process should consist in reasonable discussion of social problems and policy proposals to address them across a wide spread of a society. Participants in such discussion should be sincere, open to persuasion by the arguments of others, express their own opinions respectfully and in ways that they claim other ought to be able to accept.<sup>1</sup> Under ideal conditions of reasonableness, publicity, and political equality, as well as adequate information and enough time, the discussion yields the policy outcome that is the most just because it is the best reasoned and criticized. This theory does not reduce ideas of justice to the outcome of ideal democratic practice. Rather, it argues that properly conditioned discussion is the only means that we mortals have to discover what policies and practices are most just in particular situations.

A crucial element in these ideal conditions is inclusion.<sup>2</sup> All those whose basic interests are affected by a policy issue ought to have effective opportunity to participate in the decision making process. Of course inclusion is a key requirement of political equality and mutual respect. My concern here, however, is with how the inclusion of all affected in their basic interests contributes to the epistemic quality of discussion. The effective representation of all opinions, interests and social perspectives in a policy discussion is the best way to promote the most just outcomes, because such inclusion brings the greatest amount of social knowledge to the discussion. In a complex mass society people stand in structurally different positions in relation to one another which differently condition their interests and provide them differing vantage points on how the society works and on one another's actions.

Because of their structurally conditioned differing interests, policies can have rather different consequences for various social groups. From their different vantage points, moreover, members of some structurally differentiated social groups can often foresee

---

<sup>1</sup> Among the writers whom I include as theorists of deliberative democracy are Joshua Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy," in Alan Hamlin and Philip Pettit, ed., *The Good Polity* (London: Blackwell, 1989); John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); James Bohman, *Public Deliberation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> It is in thinking through the meaning and implications of inclusion that I consider I have made a distinct contribution to the literature on deliberative democracy. See Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

possible consequences of proposed policies that are less salient to others. A political discussion that aims to arrive at the most just policies thus needs to involve exchange among the opinions, interests and experiences of members of all social segments, so that they can teach one another about considerations they might not think of, debate with, criticize and try to persuade one another from their different points of view, and thereby pool their collective understandings. Inclusion does not mean simply the formal opportunity to register opinions, but the effective ability for each to express themselves in their own idiom in ways that others differently situated can hear.

Even the most democratic of societies in the world today fall short of the practical political equality that promotes that kind of inclusion in political discussion and decision making. That is largely because these societies contain considerable injustices – structural social and economic inequalities that privilege some segments and deprive others of adequate means of self-development and autonomy. In democratic societies structural social and economic inequalities tends to produce inequality of political power. That usually means that more advantaged social segments are able to preserve their position by means of existing democratic processes, because their voices, opinions, experiences and interests have political hegemony. This seems to be a vicious circle: Where a society contains social and economic injustices, democratic processes often reinforce more than undermine those injustices.

I think that there is only one way to break this circle: for less privileged social groups to organize and insist that their interests, perspectives and experience be a vibrant part of policy discussion, and for political institutions to take special measures to assure the representation of these groups in decision making processes. Political processes need only take special measures to assure representation of relatively disadvantaged groups just because those relatively advantaged socially and economically usually also have disproportionate influence in the political process. Affirmative measures to assure representation of relative marginalized groups functions then to compensate for an existing political imbalance.

There are many possible mechanisms for such compensatory representation of hitherto underrepresented groups in political processes. One is to mandate quotas of members of certain groups in legislative bodies or on party lists. Many states and political parties in the world have recently instituted such quota rules for women, because they have recognized that without these rules in most forums of political decision making women will continue comprise a pitifully small proportion. This is not the only means for amplifying the voices of relatively excluded groups in the political process. Strong support for organizing in civil society together with access to public media is another.

Increasing the presence and influence of members of politically weak or excluded groups does not guarantee that the outcomes of policy debate will then be more just. To the extent that adding the opinions, social perspectives, and critical voices of these people to public debate increases everyone's understanding of the problems some people face and the possible consequences of alternative policies, however, instituting more just policies becomes more likely.

## *The Capability Approach and Deliberative Democracy*

David Crocker<sup>1</sup>

Institute for Philosophy & Public Policy, University of Maryland

In what follows, I argue that Sen's conception of democracy would be fruitfully enriched and specified by explicitly drawing on some features of the theory and practice of what is called "deliberative democracy." As Sen observes, democracy is a complex and demanding system, one that is not to be equated with majority rule:

Democracy has complex demands, which certainly include voting and respect for election results, but it also requires the protection of liberties and freedoms, respect for legal entitlements, and the guaranteeing of free discussion and uncensored distribution of news and fair comment. Even elections can be deeply defective if they occur without the different sides getting an adequate opportunity to present their respective cases, or without the electorate enjoying the freedom to obtain news and to consider the views of the competing protagonists. Democracy is a demanding system, and not just a mechanical condition (like majority rule) taken in isolation.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to its intrinsic and instrumental value, Sen argues that democratic governance is "constructively" good insofar it provides institutions and processes in which people can learn from each other and "construct" or decide on the values and priorities of the society. It is here that the theory of deliberative democracy may contribute to the capability approach by offering a principled account of the processes groups employ to decide certain questions and form their values. Among the choices that groups make are the following:<sup>3</sup> 1) The choice of agents and participants: Who should be a member of the group? Should the group make its own choices and make them deliberatively or should it choose to have some other agent or authority make them? Sen assumes that people who are most affected by a decision should make the decision; 2) The choice of the decision-making process: groups have a choice from among several collective decision-making procedures, including some form of democratic decision-making; 3) The choice of agency versus well-being: when the community's chooses to make its *own* decisions instead of giving the responsibility to others when the latter would increase the well-being of the group or some of its members; 4) The choice between functioning and capability: should for example a health policy focus on making people healthy now (through curative medicine) or make them free from ill health (through preventative medicine)?; 5) The choice and weighting of *valuable* capabilities and functionings in contrast to those that are trivial or evil; 6) The choice of *basic* capabilities and thresholds: a community often must designate some capabilities as *basic with respect to urgency and a minimally decent level*; 7) The choice of distributive and other values: should a community, for example, prioritize equity over efficiency, or social stability over social justice?

Each of these types of choice confronts groups, from the local to the global level. It is clear, as we have seen, that for Sen "public scrutiny and criticism" have a role to play in these valuational debates and that such debate "is a crucial part of the exercise of democracy and responsible social choice."<sup>4</sup> But what does Sen mean by public scrutiny and public reason? How does he conceive of the process of public valuational and policy discussion? What,

---

<sup>1</sup>This is a summary of portions of "Sen and Deliberative Democracy," in Alexander Kaufman, ed., *Capabilities Equality: Basic Issues and Problems*, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 155-97; and Chapter 11 in David A. Crocker's manuscript, *The Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy*. The summary has been edited by Séverine Deneulin.

<sup>2</sup> Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," *Journal of Democracy* (1999) 10 (3): 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> The published essay and book manuscript discuss, from the vantage point of the capability approach, several other choices that groups often make.

<sup>4</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 30 and 110.

more precisely, are his views on democratic decision-making as a kind of “responsible social choice?” Alkire correctly identifies what is missing: “The problem is that [...] Sen chooses not to specify the possible range of procedures by which valuational issues are to be resolved or by which information on valuations is to be obtained.”<sup>5</sup> The literature on deliberative democracy provides a resource for addressing these questions of democratic procedures and principles.

The first contribution concerns aims. Deliberation aims to solve *concrete* problems or to devise general policies for solving specific problems. It also aims to provide a fair way in which free and equal members of a group can overcome their differences and reach agreement about action and policy.. Here fairness means that *each* member is treated with respect in that each member has the right to make his voice heard and to contribute to the final decision.

A second contribution of deliberative democracy to Sen’s capability approach consists of clarifying and defending three principles that should regulate collectively reasoned agreements: reciprocity, publicity, and accountability. The ideal of *reciprocity* prescribes that group member make proposals and offer justification in terms that others can understand and could accept. The ideal of *publicity* helps us flesh out Sen’s reference to “public” discussion and the importance of “rich” information for rational choice. Publicity demands, among other things, that each member is free to engage (directly or by representation) in the deliberative process, that the process is transparent to all, and that each knows that to which she is agreeing or disagreeing. Each group member is also *accountable* to all in the sense of giving acceptable reasons to the others. Accountability extends then not only to one’s fellow group members and those one represents, but also to those in other groups who are affected by the group’s decisions.

Third, deliberative democracy clarifies the scope of the deliberative process.<sup>6</sup> Democratic deliberation is relevant for, on the one hand, democratic politics and such governing institutions as legislative bodies, administrative agencies, and, on the other hand, nongovernmental groups whose members view themselves as free and equal and engaged in a cooperative enterprise. One might also add that anyone *affected* by the group should have a role in its deliberations and decisions. Perhaps these outsiders should be consulted for their view, but should they be treated as equal members with the right to decide? These are questions being debated by deliberative democrats.

A fourth way in which deliberative democracy can contribute to the capability approach is to help identify background and institutional conditions that are conducive to a group’s democratic deliberation. These conditions coincide with and reinforce institutional arrangements that Sen himself advocates. Richardson identifies the following “institutions needed to preserve the background justice of democratic deliberation”:<sup>7</sup> 1) equal political liberty (“each citizen is to enjoy the same freedoms of speech, assembly, and political participation”<sup>8</sup>); 2) equality before the law (citizens have the same fundamental constitutional rights regardless of ethnicity, religion, class, education, or sexual preference); 3) economic justice (economic poverty, inequality, and concentration of wealth can impede if not doom people’s freedoms and deliberative participation); 4) procedural fairness (“the process of democratic debate and decision must itself be structured so as to allow each person a fair

---

<sup>5</sup> Sabina Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 13.

<sup>6</sup> See Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, 116-38).

<sup>7</sup> Henry S Richardson, *Democratic Autonomy: Public Reasoning About the Ends of Policy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 88.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

chance to participate and to counteract to a degree the potential influence of disparities in economic and political power”<sup>9</sup>).

A final contribution that deliberative democracy makes is its specification of the skills and virtues that deliberators should have or acquired. James Bohman argues that citizens in a democratic society should be politically equal in the sense that they at least cross a threshold of minimal “political functioning” and “effective social freedom.”<sup>10</sup> Qualitative political equality is to be seen as a certain level of political functioning and capacities. A person would be politically poor if he or she were not able to function above the minimal threshold. Among the skills that good deliberators would have for minimally adequate “political functioning”,<sup>11</sup> Bohman highlights (i) the skill of initiating public dialogue or making proposals about an issue; (ii) the ability to engage in argument and counter-argument; (iii) skills in framing and reframing a debate, showing that some dichotomies are neither exclusive nor exhaustive, and finding ways to harmonize proposals and compromise values; (iv) an ability for persuasive but not manipulative rhetoric.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to these skills, Gutmann and Thompson propose three deliberative virtues of democratic citizens: (mutual) respect, civic integrity, and civic magnanimity. A virtuous deliberator respects other group members in the sense that—though she (or he) might not like the others and have profound disagreements with them—she has “a favorable attitude toward, and constructive interaction with, the persons with whom one [she] disagrees.”<sup>13</sup> Virtuous deliberators express civic integrity when they are sincere and honest, putting forward the proposals and reasons they do because they believe them and not (merely) for strategic reasons. Deliberators demonstrate civic magnanimity by the attitudes they have toward the proposals, reasons, or ends of those with whom they disagree are disapprove – for example, they assess the merits of each other’s *arguments* rather than engage in *ad hominem* attacks and they are open-minded with regard to persons with whom they disagree.

A frequent criticism of the relevance of Sen’s capability approach for global, national, regional, and local development is that it leaves too many evaluative issues unresolved. By enlisting the resources of deliberative democracy, I have sought to strengthen Sen’s appeal to democracy as public discussion as a principled process by which many evaluative issues may be resolved. A further task is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the deliberative dimension of democracy and to assess criticisms of this effort to deepen democratic theory and practice. Especially important, in relation to the charge of utopianism, is addressing the question of ways in which “deliberative activists” can and should work for deliberative goals in a polarized and unjust world.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* These conditions do not entail the conclusion that democracy is a mere utopia if these conditions are not fulfilled. Rather than a country first achieving certain enabling conditions for democracy and then achieving democracy, the country gradually may achieve the “enabling conditions,” *by means of* democracy. Sen puts it aptly: “A country does not have to be deemed fit *for* democracy; rather, it has to become fit *through* democracy.” (“Democracy as a Universal Value,” 4.)

<sup>10</sup> James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity and Democracy*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and (1997) “Deliberative Democracy and Effective Social Freedom: Capabilities, Resources, and Opportunities,” in *Deliberative Democracy*, ed., James Bohman and William Rehg, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 124, 12

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 90. These personal virtues fit nicely with a four-step process in which deliberators make proposal, engage in give-and-take to assess proposal, arrive at (more or less) informal agreement, and make an official decision (sometimes through voting).

<sup>13</sup> Gutmann, and Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement*, 79.

<sup>14</sup> See Archon Fung “Deliberation Before the Revolution: Toward an Ethics of Deliberative Democracy in an Unjust World,” *Political Theory*, 33, 2005, 397-419.

## *Human Development and Habermas's Critical Theory*

Pablo Mella<sup>1</sup>

Instituto Filosófico P. Bonó, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

What can the thought of Jürgen Habermas, the major contemporary German political philosopher, bring to the capability approach and human development? In order to respond to that question, we need first to describe the philosophical tradition to which Habermas belongs—the Frankfurt School—and how he has given it a new direction.

The first Frankfurt School gathered around the Institute of Social Investigation in Frankfurt. Since its beginnings, the School sought to develop a multidisciplinary social thinking, which unites moral and political philosophy with economics and psychology. Since most of the founders of the School (Marc Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and Walter Benjamin) were Jews, the School exiled to the United States in 1933. Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Germany after the War, and published *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the founding text of the School.

According to 'critical theory', social theory cannot be done in the positivist-objectivist mode of analysis. Neither can it submit itself to axiological neutrality. It is in that sense Marxist-inspired. Thinking has to help transform the world, liberating it from all oppression. Horkheimer and Adorno are convinced that social theory has to be 'critical'. Referring to Marx, critical theory believes that reason cannot remain in a contemplative ideal, taking refuge in the safe place of neutrality under the banner of objectivity. This ideal of objectivity produces a neutral or indifferent attitude, which leads the intellectual or social thinker to legitimize forms of domination in modern capitalist societies. A contemplative attitude perpetuates the established order without changing it. Critical theory aims at freeing reason. The objective of research is to emancipate and free people from oppression. The critical thinker does not therefore separate social philosophy from social theory. In the case of modern society—daughter of the Enlightenment—the Frankfurt School fought against the diffusion of 'instrumental rationality', that is, a type of rationality, which only analyzes situations and things as means to reach a pre-defined end, neglecting the consequences of actions for concrete human lives.

Habermas is the heir of this tradition in which Marxism and psychoanalysis meet. His ideal is to open a space for a rationality, which is not exploitative and repressive. His work can be summarized in four stages. In the first stage, Habermas is interested in the following themes: 1) the critique of instrumental reason; 2) the critique of positivism in social sciences; 3) the elaboration of a theory of knowledge which establishes a relationship between knowledge and the interests of knowledge (all knowledge has an interest and nothing is neutral).

In the second stage, Habermas lays down new methodological foundations for critical theory: 1) a theory of evolution of societies, interested in establishing the ways in which societies solve their practical or moral conflicts; 2) a hermeneutical critique of functionalist sociology; 3) a linguistic foundation of rationality with universal vocation (i.e., language as fundamental social action). This leads Habermas to recognize the need for a 'reconstruction of historical materialism' in order to account for social transformations in the late capitalist stage of modern societies. Late capitalism societies have 'socially learned' to transform their conflicts of redistribution into the 'welfare state'. But strangely, the welfare state lacked adequate foundations to maintain social unity. It had lost 'legitimacy' because it no longer possessed a unique common ethic.

---

<sup>1</sup> Translated from Spanish by Séverine Deneulin.

The third stage of Habermas's thinking culminates in the publication of *A Theory of Communicative Action*, in 1981. From this extremely complex and interdisciplinary work I would like to highlight three of its most well-known conclusions. First, today, in secularized societies permeated by instrumental reason, people have to live with a fragile social identity given value pluralism. Second, the unique way of being relational in these societies is by opposing a communicative rationality to the pervading instrumental rationality. Third, even if the 'life world' of people is threatened by the 'system' (capital and bureaucracy, which 'juridifies' relationships between people), it can be protected by 'communicative action', which is the practical translation of communicative rationality. Habermas writes: 'I have called communicative action a type of interaction in which *all* the participants consult with each other about their individual plan of action and pursue their objectives of dialogue *without restraint*.' Expressions of this 'communicative action' are especially found in social movements, such as the Civil Rights movement in the United States, ecological movements, or the modern state as provider of rights. In contrast to instrumental action, communicative action is oriented towards an 'understanding' of the world. Language is the best expression of the fact that, in order to live together, humans need to communicate with each other, understand each other and reach consensus. The proper attitude of a social actor is therefore dialogical and rational discourse. Legitimacy depends on the rational acceptance of arguments.

The fourth stage of Habermas's thinking is the practical application of his critical theory of communicative action. Together with Karl Otto Apel, he proposes an 'ethics of discourse', which has as a fundamental rule the ideal of the best argument to face moral or political conflicts. Habermas has also applied his theory to the fields of law and democratic theory. In the latter, he argues that the ideal of civic republicanism is not viable in a pluralist society. Democracy is a matter of arriving at compromises or agreements by respecting deliberative procedures. Justice is what people agree, through free public debate, as being just. A just society is one in which communicative action wins over instrumental action, following the formal rule of the acceptance of the best argument. In this society, the life-world can resist with success the dynamics of colonization undertaken by the 'system' (capital and bureaucracy).

There are many similarities between Habermas's critical theory briefly described above and the capability approach. At the most fundamental level, they share a refusal to present themselves as theories of neutral contemplation of the social world, without any commitment to transform it. I will limit myself to underline three new perspectives that Habermas's critical theory could bring to the human development paradigm and the capability approach. The first one relates to the critique of monological reason. Human development is based upon the rationality of people as individuals. Given its Kantian and liberal foundations, the individual appears to rationally face the values of his or her community, submitting them to the exercise of his/her reason. Freedom is in some sense associated with a theory of solitary rational choice. Habermas's ethics of discourse challenges that assumption. What is socially valuable or true cannot be established as a solitary act of conscience. This can only be reached, provisionally, between members of a community of communication. The 'public debate' to which Amartya Sen refers would need more substantial foundations than the capability approach currently offers. Habermas could bring important insights in that matter.

Second, the human development paradigm would need a deeper critique of the historical processes behind a rationalization which excludes large groups of people. The Frankfurt School, following Hegel, Marx and Weber, attempts to dialogue with historical processes. It shows the historical drama of freedom and rationality. It especially shows the way in which modern European rationality subjugates so many non-Western cultures and ways of life as well as the ways it makes significant contributions to them. Even if the

founders of the human development paradigm, Mabub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, were Pakistani and Indian respectively, they belonged to the rationalized elites of their societies. As rationalized actors, they privilege the 'rational individual' over his tradition or tribalism. The human development paradigm does not measure the negative consequences of the cultural transformation it proposes. It remains located in the historical and linear ideal of the Enlightenment. Wherever there are 'human development policies', it is assumed that there will always be an improvement. It is therefore vital that the human development paradigm pays more attention to the processes which have led to 'globalization', and which have made entire collectivities 'victims of history', as Walter Benjamin has underlined. A special task would be to determine the role of religion in the search for better social policies. Habermas now defends the public role of religion, provided they submit themselves to the rules of public debate. If religion is part of what a person sees as valuable, as the human development paradigm affirms, it should explore more the role religion's play in public debate.

Third, a Habermasian perspective would bring a socio-political analysis, which is more complex and embedded in conflict. The last *Human Development Report* (2005) and its focus on international cooperation is a significant example of how the human development paradigm underestimates history and conflict in the context of modernity. Speaking of the wars, which impede development at the global scale, no mention is made of the Iraq war. For the *Report*, war is always something that Africans do and the reason for which poverty is not reduced. But, who sells the weapons? Why are religious sensibilities used to provide an ideology for conflict? If we take Habermas's notion of 'system', maybe we will be able to see that the promotion of markets and better 'governance' often colonizes the communicative foundations of the major part of the world population. The human development paradigm posits itself in 'inter-national' and not global terms. Its ultimate analysis is the nation-state. Habermas proposes a 'post-national identity', which is truly universal.

The capability approach and the human development paradigm have an ambiguous position on this. They insist on 'what people have reason to choose and value'. But to what extent is 'what people value' linked to the 'macdonalization' of the world, as the anti-globalization movements love to say. Why is it that, what a majority of the poor value most is an immigration visa to the North, and why does the UNDP not put the means to grant 'what people value' in this case? Habermas's critical theory, with its call for the need for a political hermeneutics, can help us to situate the mental horizons which interweave in not such a pacific way with globalizing processes. In other words, it can help situate ourselves responsibly in the conflict of interpretations, which occur within the 'rationalizing' processes of the life world of the poor, acknowledging in which side we are at the end.

### *Interview with Smitu Kothari*

In our conversation we explore social movements and their relationship with public participation and debate. **Smitu Kothari** is one of the founders of *Lokayan* ("Dialogue of the People"), a centre in India promoting exchange between non-party political formations and concerned scholars and other citizens from India and the rest of the world. At *Lokayan*, he is the Program Director of the Seeds of Hope and the Tribal Self-Rule Programs. He is a political organizer involved in ecological, cultural and human rights issues striving to collectively forge a national and global alternative that is socially just and ecologically sane. He also directs Intercultural Resources, a centre promoting national, regional and global intercultural dialogues, exchanges and interventions. He is President of the International Group for Grassroots Initiatives, a Contributing Editor of *The Ecologist* and of *Development*, a founding member of *Jan Vikas Andolan* (Movement for Peoples' Development) and has been a visiting professor at Princeton and Cornell Universities. He has published extensively on critiques of contemporary economic and cultural development, the relationship of nature, culture and democracy, developmental displacement and social movements.

Dr. Kothari recently spoke with Manu Mathai over the telephone.<sup>1</sup> Excerpts follow:

*How would you define a 'social movement'?*

Activists and scholars have tried for decades to define social movements. But given the plurality and diversity of movements and their complex trajectories, definitions have largely been inadequate. However, to enable identification, we can highlight some prerequisites. Broadly, a social movement can be identified as a collective mobilization of people *sustained over time* that seeks to inform and influence a larger constituency and through various strategies and actions attempts to create a larger mobilization to bring about the change it desires. However, often, the term is used loosely creating a great deal of confusion. Consider as illustrations, the women's movement or the environmental movement. Here, 'movement' serves more as an umbrella, which has under it a vast array of institutional forms—individuals, small NGOs, large organizations, corporate groups, etc. representing the entire gamut of social and political opinion. In fact, a majority of those involved are not even active in any movements. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between protest, social mobilization and social movement. Consider, for instance, the case of an organization resisting a hike in bus fares. This is not a social movement but a protest or a social mobilization. If, however, this protest is sustained over time and transits from being a mobilization focused on one specific issue in an individual neighborhood to, say, a citywide mobilization for urban renewal, achieving political stridency and expanding its political base in the process, it can transit into becoming a social movement.

*What in your opinion are special contributions of social movements to a more dynamic public debate in society? Could you share illustrations of social movements and their contribution to public debate?*

By definition a social movement can also be a movement of right-wing activists and groups; for instance, mobilizations of the Hindu right in India are also a social movement. Thus we must note that 'social movement' is an ideologically neutral category, and, therefore,

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Kothari has since had to attend to a family health emergency and was unable to review this edited version of the conversation before publication. Any changes or corrections will be presented in the next issue of *Maitreyee*.

it does not follow that all movements are fighting for social justice or, generally speaking, for a saner, more equitable and just world. However, for the rest of this conversation if we agree that we are talking of movements that seek to contribute towards the building of a world with less deprivation and suffering, more equity and ecological sanity, there are numerous contributions of social movements that we can discuss. The Indian independence movement is a superb example of a social movement; its achievements towards contributing to public debate and a comprehensive transformation of society are outstanding and clearly evident. Another comparable example is the civil rights movement in the US or, more recently, the movement for indigenous rights in Bolivia (and at numerous other sites around the world) or movement for the independence of East Timor.

In terms of the actual mechanics, a social movements' contribution to the quality, intensity and spread of public debate is related to the capacity of the social movement to make itself visible. In turn visibility is largely dependent on a) the tactics and strategies that the movement employs b) the capacity to engage with the institutions and structures that it seeks to change c) the resonance that the movement creates with larger publics, and, d) the ability to bring the media to pay attention to the issues that it is raising and to provide an empathetic and sustained presentation of these issues.

*What are some of the internal challenges facing social movements?*

Even while social movements contribute to the creation of important changes within our societies, they do not automatically guarantee that citizens will realize a better life. Therefore, there continues to be an ongoing need to ensure that what has been secured manifests itself in people's lives. There is also a need to initiate new movements to address unfinished tasks. For instance, India's Independence movement created widespread aspirations and expectations opening up the need for new movements to address and fulfil them. The success of the movement in bringing about independence from the British did not automatically guarantee a better deal for tribals and Dalits and an overwhelming majority of unorganized workers or create a process of decolonizing society and the human mind. A grossly unjust and unequal world remains despite centuries of social movements. This points to the continuing urgent need for people to respond to their conscience, to engage structures and systems of injustice and oppression and to join or create new movements that are struggling to fulfill such unfinished tasks.

*Have movements moved from one gain to the other?*

At one level yes, social movements have moved from one gain to another. However, a gain often creates a new set of challenges, which therefore needs sustained social engagement and mobilization as well as new movements. Often, success can lead to complacency and a consequent decline of the movement. As Sydney Tarrow has remarked, social movements go through "cycles of protest" and have to keep radicalizing in order to gain more support; the radicalization in turn could lead to a loss of support. However, it is not necessary that all movements have to go through cycles. For instance, the dominant economic and political system continues to be predatory and antagonistic to 'ecosystem people' and their way of life. Even as we speak, communities of ecosystem people are subject to threats from mining, pollution, conservation, and infrastructure projects, among others. Ecosystems face ever-escalating challenges and thus, the impetus for sustained social movements to arrest and reverse this crisis remains.

*Can you share illustrations of social movements which have changed the priorities of governments or which have reversed a policy decision? What makes social movements successful in reverting policy decisions?*

Illustrations abound, but we are constrained by space. Social movements have had significant impacts on public policy. For instance, the Zapatista movement in Mexico involving thousands of indigenous people have not only been largely successful in defending their land and their forests from predatory processes but have also managed to influence national and global politics and policy in the process inspiring and giving confidence to scores of movements and millions of others around the globe. Another illustration is the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement). Although the movement has not stopped the construction of large-dams on the Narmada River it has dramatically transformed the global debate on large dams and their claimed benefits. It has also strongly influenced national and global policy on harnessing water and given strength to hundreds of movements across the world that are fighting for fairer and saner water practices and policies. The movement also led to the first ever, significant international commission—the World Commission on Dams—that had equal representation of all stakeholders and functioned for over three years in an open and democratic manner.

However, challenges remain. If political, social or legislative change is achieved, how can these changes be sustained? What kinds of structures, institutions and processes need to be in place to ensure that these gains are not lost? How can local movements engage national questions or global challenges? How can they creatively resist attempts to co-opt or crush them? These are just a few of the numerous challenges.

Being as I am, involved in social movements as well as engaged in scholarship, I also focus on understanding and interpreting these processes for wider audiences. We need to be constantly vigilant of the structures and implications of political, economic and cultural power. While these structures are definitely under strain, they are by no means disintegrating, but selectively reinventing themselves. Just look at the continuing onslaught on a majority of the world's peasants under the present neo-liberal policies. I very much hope that *Maitreyee's* readers will further engage themselves in addressing these structures and situating their work towards the wider realization of justice, peace and ecological sanity.

*Our conversation with Smitu Kothari will be continued in the October issue of Maitreyee and addresses structures of power and human development. In the interim, please email any questions that you might have for Dr. Kothari to [manu@udel.edu](mailto:manu@udel.edu). We hope to include them in the second part of our conversation and make it a more interactive process.*

## ***Public Debate and Dialogue in Uganda: Facing Perilous Times***

**Stephen Schwenke**

**Ethics and Public Management Programme, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda**

Most Ugandans enjoy a good debate, and particularly now as election season reaches its peak. The country goes to the polls on February 23<sup>rd</sup> in its first multi-party election in 26 years, with the incumbent president seeking his third official term.

This election is particularly contentious. Having effectively manipulated Parliament into changing Uganda's constitution to eliminate term limits for the office of president, Yoweri Museveni looks likely to gain another five-year term as president. If completed, this would bring his total time at Uganda's helm to 25 years – an incredibly long tenure by any head of state in any democratic country. Museveni assumed power in 1986 through a bush war that overthrew the government of Milton Obote, and only sought a formal democratic mandate in 1996, and again in 2001. That last election was fraught with electoral irregularities – including as many as 1.3 million “ghost voters” among the 7.5 million votes actually cast.<sup>1</sup> This election seems to be similarly troubled; Human Rights Watch has just announced its conviction that this election will not be free or fair, due to the lack of a level playing field and widespread government harassment of opposition candidates.<sup>2</sup> After so many years in power, President Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) party are clearly intent on not losing the privileges, influence, and patronage networks that come with such well-entrenched power.

While the change in the constitution has itself been the subject of much heated public debate and dialogue, the manner in which this election is being conducted is even more troubling to those with democratic yearnings. The only credible opposition candidate, Dr. Kizza Besigye, recently returned to Uganda from self-imposed exile in South Africa after losing to Museveni in 2001, only to be arrested by Ugandan authorities on charges of treason and rape. There followed a dismal and almost theatrical chain of events, in which the High Court and the Uganda Law Society challenged the manner and legal bases of Dr. Besigye's arrest and prolonged detention in a maximum-security prison, and the efforts by the current government to try Dr. Besigye simultaneously in civil court and by military court marshal (no matter that Dr. Besigye is a civilian). Dr. Besigye was finally allowed his freedom – on bail – to pursue his candidacy for the presidential office on behalf of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), and in due course the courts held that the rape charges had no merit. Almost no effort was made to cover up the fact that the rape charges were orchestrated from State House, and the sitting President still continues to pursue other means to disallow Dr. Besigye's official status as a candidate, even at this late stage of the campaign.

Public deliberation during the saga of the arrest and detention of Dr. Besigye has been constrained by heavy-handed government intervention. Despite very specific constitutional provisions to the contrary, the Ugandan government has refused to allow people to hold peaceful demonstrations, and outlawed any form of assemblies, public rallies, or even academic seminars associated with the treason case against Dr. Besigye. The government also forbids debates on the radio regarding this case, flying in the face of legal and human rights to freedom of expression.

With so much election drama, and with such serious and open threats to constitutional freedoms, Ugandans do have much to debate. There are, however, also other pressing issues that warrant urgent public debate and deliberation, both on their own merits and in the context of the upcoming elections. Consider these:

---

<sup>1</sup> Sunday Monitor Online, see <http://www.monitor.co.ug/sunday/news/news02121.php>

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch, see <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/uganda/>

- 1) A 20-year old brutal war continues to rage in the north of Uganda, described by U.N. Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland as “the most under-reported story in the world today.”<sup>3</sup>
- 2) Uganda is experiencing a severe energy shortage – due to both incredibly poor planning and rapidly lowering levels of Lake Victoria that render much of the country’s hydroelectric capacity useless. Extensive power outages are seriously weakening the economic and administrative performance of the country, and inconveniencing the lives of many (particularly urban) Ugandans. There is no relief in sight for the foreseeable future.
- 3) The prevalence of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis remains at disturbing levels. With over half a million persons with HIV/AIDS, this disease is the leading cause of death in Uganda.<sup>4</sup>
- 4) Corruption in Uganda is rampant and entrenched. Transparency International has ranked corruption in Uganda at a level of 117, not far from the worst ranking of 158, and has indicated that corruption is increasing.<sup>5</sup>

Given these weighty and disturbing issues, is the Ugandan population eager and ready to claim their democratic rights through the ballot box? To a large extent, they are not. In fact, almost 47% of Ugandans still do not even know the date of the election.<sup>6</sup>

Uganda is not without champions in the deliberative cause, however. Newspaper journalist and radio personality Andrew M. Mwenda has established a national reputation as a provocative advocate for the average man or woman, challenging senior political figures on many hot issues. His challenges have not been without response – he currently faces more than a dozen criminal charges of sedition and “promoting sectarianism” in connection with a talk show broadcast in August on KFM radio. There are other disturbing trends in the government’s efforts to stifle public deliberation and freedom of the press as well.<sup>7</sup>

Are there hopeful signs? Yes. Several of Uganda’s leading civil society organizations are sponsoring a public dialogue on February 16<sup>th</sup> to evaluate the specific details of each presidential candidate’s party manifesto. On February 15<sup>th</sup>, as I write this, Ugandans are preparing to watch and listen to the very first presidential debate in Uganda’s history, broadcast nationwide on television and radio by Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, with American sponsorship.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Besigye and the other less popular opposition candidates will debate current issues for two hours, but the incumbent – President Museveni – has publicly stated that he “is too busy with important constituencies than playing to the gallery in a debate”.<sup>9</sup>

Democracy is still new to Uganda, and the exercise of that democracy—through deliberation, debate, and the ballot box—remains tentative. If allowed that freedom, the Ugandan public seems intent to let its voice be heard, if only gradually.

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.imcworldwide.org/loc\\_uganda\\_crisis.shtml](http://www.imcworldwide.org/loc_uganda_crisis.shtml)

<sup>4</sup> See Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation fact sheet on HIV/AIDS in Uganda at <http://www.kff.org/hivaids/upload/7368.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See Transparency International CPI Index at [http://www1.transparency.org/cpi/2005/cpi2005\\_infocus.html](http://www1.transparency.org/cpi/2005/cpi2005_infocus.html)

<sup>6</sup> Sunday Monitor, February 12, 2006, page 7 and <http://www.iri.org/02-09-06-UgandaPoll.asp>

<sup>7</sup> The Uganda Government established a new body - the Media Centre - in early January to vet foreign journalists’ applications for accreditation. Information Minister James Buturo said the step was taken because foreign journalists had become a “security threat.” Also, at least three Ugandan journalists currently face serious criminal charges – including “promoting sectarianism” – arising out of their reports for local media on matters of public concern. See <http://allafrica.com/stories/200601250622.html>

<sup>8</sup> The debates are being organized and funded by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

<sup>9</sup> Daily Monitor, Saturday February 11, 2006, page 2

## ***ANNOUNCEMENTS***

### ***First Latin-American and Caribbean Conference on the Human Capability Approach***

**Universidad Ibero-Americana, Mexico City, Mexico**

**July 03, 2006 - July 04, 2006**

Website: <http://www.uia.mx/investigacion/iidses/hca/default.html>

-----

### ***7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on International Development Ethics***

**Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda**

**July 19, 2006 - July 22, 2006**

Website: <http://www.development-ethics.org>

-----

### ***2006 International Conference of HDCA***

**'Freedom and Justice'**

**Groningen, The Netherlands**

**August 29, 2006 – September 01, 2006**

**Deadline** for submission of paper and panel proposals is **April 1st 2006**

Website: <http://www.hd-ca.org> (go to 'Conferences/Events')

-----

### ***Special Issue of the Journal of Human Development***

***'One's Freedom as Another: Agency and the Social Fabric'***

The *Journal of Human Development* invites submissions for a Special Issue on how people's sense of affiliation with one another affects their capacity to act and to make changes in their lives and the life of others.

**Deadline** for submission (full papers only): **July 31<sup>st</sup> 2006**

Contact: [tom.deherdt@ua.ac.be](mailto:tom.deherdt@ua.ac.be), [s.deneulin@bath.ac.uk](mailto:s.deneulin@bath.ac.uk)

-----