

## *Discussion of the paper by T.A. Mensah*

ELSHTAIN

Would you comment on an interesting tension in your paper? You articulate the three constitutive or *de jure* principles regarding the form of membership and organization of African unity, including the sovereign equality of all members. Here is the one I want to focus on, namely non-interference in the internal affairs of States and true respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each State. Yet, of course, a lot of what we've been talking about here is the many ways in which States are interfered with all the time, and that their internal affairs are not in fact subject to non-interference. Rather, the question is what forms of interference, to what ends. The whole point of the emergence of an international human rights regime in the last half century is a precedent to interfere in the internal affairs of States and to try to figure out ways to interfere ever more robustly. Do you have some thoughts on this interesting tension and dilemma that you can share with us?

VILLACORTA

I would like to congratulate Professor Mensah for succeeding in his formidable task of integrating a report on three continents.

I would just like to elaborate on the Asian aspect. It is in vogue now among Asian authoritarian leaders to invoke the so-called Asian approach to democracy, or the Asian way. I hope that Westerners will not just swallow this argument. What is the Asian way? Of course, when we speak of the inscrutable Oriental, what comes to mind are such concepts as respect for authority, elders, and tradition. Authoritarian rulers emphasize the communitarian approach which gives priority to the community over the individual. The Asian way is supposed to give more importance to the family. But I think it is not any different from the importance attached by Europeans and Americans to the family, although perhaps, we talk more about it. We stress family honour, family cohesiveness, the value of education and so on. We Asians give premium to polite speech, consensus, smooth interpersonal relationships, harmony, and reciprocity. The so-called Asian way underscores the importance of "face", the culture of shame. We

also have the ontological inclination towards the cyclical and relativist view of reality and a behavioural inclination towards non-confrontation which we claim lends itself to a foreign policy of peace and non-alignment.

Undoubtedly, all these have their positive consequences and they indeed could contribute to harmony in life and society, but this is also double-edged. There can be negative manifestations of these so-called Asian values, especially in relation to the development of democracy. For example, too much emphasis on family ties and personal relationships was one of the major causes of the financial crisis that beset not only the new so-called “tigers” such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, but also Japan and South Korea.

Lastly, I would just like to emphasize that democracy, which is always described as a Western import by enemies of democracy in non-Western countries is not exactly of Western origin. These were elements of democratic thinking even in the teachings of Gautama Buddha in ancient Buddhist scriptures and also in the writings of Mencius.

So, while Aristotle, the much-vaunted father of democratic thought, was talking about slavery as something acceptable, Gautama Buddha condemned this. Buddha also advocated the practice of democratic consultation, although for obvious reasons, he didn't use the word “democracy”.

Having said that, I think that in addition to these Oriental contributions, the Western world has indeed contributed significantly to the development of democracy, and this is primarily rooted in Christian teaching, the concept of human dignity and freedom, which are founded on the idea of man being both body and soul, and being a creature of God created in the likeness of God. The rights and worth of the individual find their justification in Christianity. Even gender equality and the rights of minority communities are actually rooted in Christianity.

#### MORANDE

I'm afraid that the debate has become a bit confused due to the fact that we have not considered enough the historical and geopolitical background of the development of democracy. We have talked about the main ideological or cultural streams which have led up to democracy, but we have passed over other important facts, such as, for instance, the scale and scope of the military forces and the technological escalation taking place within this military process. It's very hard to evaluate the possibilities for democracy without considering this important element.

Regarding the historical overview I would like to say that we cannot speak of globalization only at the end of the Cold War or when the Iron

Curtain fell. Globalization began well before that. Professor Zampetti stated that there were two main historical moments of universalizing, the Roman Empire and the Holy Roman-German Empire. Looking at Latin America, Asia and Africa we have to mention the Spanish and then the English and French empires, all of them unified by written language and the geopolitical power to accomplish this internalization.

Professor Mensah referred to the democratic process as a very recent result that is in part due to decolonizing and almost as if it were a desirable future and not a process that has very deep roots going back into history. I agree with him when he states that we cannot speak properly of democracy regarding the traditional societies without falling into the idea of the noble savage of Rousseau. But on the other hand, we have to understand the historical evolution that made democracy possible within which the globalization accomplished by the empires just mentioned played a fundamental role.

One of the main contributions of sociology during the second part of this century has been to overcome the analytical paradigm, inherited from the nineteenth century, which comparatively opposes traditional and modern societies, as if the first were constrained to change into the latter. We know better nowadays that the human phenomenon structures itself on different scales at the same time, from the more personalized and simple relations up to the more abstract and complex ones. A given value, such as democracy for instance, does not work the same way at all these levels. It has little sense to expect that democratic values denote the same attitudes in the family or in impersonal money exchanges. The way in which the meaning of values become determined by society is related to the differentiated levels of social complexity.

ZACHER

I would like to turn to the problem of continentalization and to build a bridge between your presentation and the presentation of Professor Bartolini – Europe being taken as an example of continentalization. Let me add: for Asia also subcontinentalization could be a very useful means by which to integrate into the global world. If there were more continentalization in Africa, in Asia, this would perhaps make the continents more equal for the whole international community. The continentalization of Europe is, however, based on relatively homogeneous nations – also in terms of democracy. If you have different regimes and states of development as in Africa and Asia and to a certain degree also in Latin America, what are the consequences for the possibilities of continentalization?

LLACH

Gracias, Presidente. Una breve intervención que es una pequeña crítica, no a la presentación del Profesor Mansah, que me ha parecido sumamente interesante e instructiva, pero sí a la tarea que se le encomendó. No es una buena idea encargarle a una persona que trate en un papel de 25 páginas, tres continentes. Puede inclusive producir una gran confusión en los destinatarios de nuestras publicaciones. Si lo que se deseaba era un análisis comparativo, debió haberse encargado, al menos, un trabajo que reflejara la realidad de cada continente.

GLENDON

I would like to express three concerns about the phrase “international civil society” as applied to international organizations. First, it seems to me that one must differentiate among the thousands of nongovernmental organizations that operate at the international level. The range of types is too great for them to be usefully lumped together. Some of the most influential, for example, are financed by private foundations whose assets dwarf the budgets of most countries in the world. They have their own agendas, their own foreign policy, and exert sovereign-like power. Lobbies and interest groups are not “civil society” in the sense that term is used by political theorists concerned about the “mediating structures” that stand between individuals and the state.

Secondly, all international organizations, whether really humanitarian or merely agents of special interests, are very distant from public-scrutiny and democratic accountability. Their relation to democracy is thus problematic.

Third, international organizations such as the U.N. and its agencies are apt, like their domestic counterparts, to develop close working relationships with lobbying organizations, and are susceptible to “capture” by special interest groups.

It thus seems desirable to avoid the term “international civil society” which may serve to mask activities that severely threaten democracy and other human values.

DE MONTBRIAL

Professor de Montbrial agrees with Professor Glendon’s comments on the concept of international society and his remarks regarding the misuse of the term “civil society” for international organizations. He reminds us that non-governmental organizations have sometimes been manipulated, particularly during the Cold War (important humanitarian organizations

then received funds from the KGB in return for some services). He argues that the notion of accountability is the weak point in the concept of “international civil society” and observes that the main difference between “international civil society” and associations in countries such as the United States – where this concept is more developed than anywhere else – is that any association is dependent on a legal and judicial system: if it breaks the law, one day or another it will have to account for it. He concludes that the concept of international civil society does have to be polished and further worked out.

On Asia, Professor de Montbrial agrees with Father Pittau and other speakers that Asia’s chance for democratization is very good. The same might hold true for Africa, all the more if economic development is available. In the case of economic downturn – particularly in China – the situation could then change. He believes that, to a large extent, with regard to the interstate system, Eastern Asia still belongs to the nineteenth century. Insisting on the necessity to come back to *realpolitik* to analyse the situation, he argues that Asian countries have not been fighting each other because they are part of the international system. He reminds us of the Red Khmers’ genocide at the end of the Vietnam war and observes that disputes regarding the South China Sea have not been solved yet and that the way the reunification of Korea will be achieved is still unknown. He states that the cornerstone of the security system in South-East Asia is the United States. Were the United States to withdraw, the system would probably explode. However, sooner or later, the United States will have to stop playing its role.

MENSAH

I wish to express my thanks to the organizers of this seminar for the opportunity to participate in what has been a very interesting and instructive discussion over the past few days. For me it has been a great pleasure and personal honour to have met and interacted with so many eminent personalities in these inspiring surroundings.

I would also like to repeat the remarks I made at the beginning of my presentation. I appreciate that the assignment I accepted was rather risky in that I took on the responsibility of presenting a statement on democracy in such large and diverse areas as Africa, Asia and Latin America. In this I fully agree with the comment of Professor Llach that to attempt to deal with such large and complex regions of the world in the compass of twenty or so pages was not only unrealistic but also likely to lead to serious misunderstanding. I hope that I reduced the risks in this regard by

concentrating on Africa in my paper, and I hope that I have been able to raise and clarify some of the burning issues of democracy in Africa. I have not attempted to answer these questions and I am sure that the organizers did not expect me to do so.

I have in turn found the presentations and the comments in the discussions very illuminating and useful. With regard to democracy and the challenges it faces in Africa, I have found particularly enlightening the insights of so many of you, not only on general concepts but also on the concrete problems with which different societies have been grappling in dealing with the democratic challenge in their different environments. I have appreciated even more the fact that no society is completely exempt from these problems, although different issues affect countries and regions in different ways. I have also been assured that the dichotomies which Africa faces in its efforts to promote the democratic ideal have been faced by most other regions and, indeed, are still on their agendas in different forms. Among these are the dichotomies between the need to preserve traditions and the imperatives of change in an increasing scientific culture; the desire to develop nation-states with shared ideals and common destinies as opposed to the benefits of respecting group identities and loyalties; the tension between the requirements of development and the protection of human rights and human dignity; the need to reconcile the major advantages of the market economy with the necessity to safeguard peoples and nations from the uncontrolled might of international capital; the need to keep a balance between the demands of globalization and the need for peoples and communities to have a measure of control over their destinies; and the importance of ensuring that in using civil society to limit the control and dominance of central state power we do not radically undermine the unifying and supervisory role of the central state.

The knowledge that these dichotomies exist in every society and the realization that the choice between the opposing ideas in them is neither easy nor avoidable has been brought home forcefully to me. For me this is the lesson that I take from this seminar. It will be a source of comfort and inspiration to me, because it shows that the struggle for democracy in Africa is not a lonely struggle, and it provides the assurance that the setbacks that will inevitably occur will not be unique to our continent.