
Transforming Global Governance for a Socially Sustainable World

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In this article I discuss the need for transformation of the current global governance system in the context of attaining peace for a socially sustainable world. I propose that nations and peoples unrepresented in the current United Nations centred system might provide new thinking as to how the human family could collectively address its common global affairs. Amplification of the voices of the unrepresented is necessary for the purposes of accessing this thinking. A preferred global governance future is described reflecting the interests of the unrepresented and the need for United Nations reforms to be implemented.

'All we are saying.....is give peace a chance' sang the Plastic Ono Band in 1969. Yet world peace eludes the human family despite decades of social activism and peace studies. Contributing factors, I propose, include the attempts by dominant nations to control other nations by fear and by force, and the marginalisation of many of the world's nations and peoples from forums such as the United Nations (UN) General Assembly where they might have a voice in decisions affecting their futures.

The UN General Assembly, comprising 193 of the world's 194 States, is at the core of the current global governance system. Some might consider the UN to be the legitimate forum for the people of the world to debate and agree the management of their common affairs, as envisioned by the Commission on Global Governance, or to seek global resolutions to challenges and intractable problems. However there are weaknesses in the structure and operation of the UN that limit its ability to act. The balance of power within the UN is skewed by the power of veto held by a small number of politically and economically dominant countries. The views on globalisation and global governance held by these countries are influenced by a commitment to neoliberalism reminiscent of the Thatcher-Reagan ethos of the 1980s. Representatives of less influential nations attending UN and World Trade Organisation forums are not always in a position to stand up to the powerful States that can wield the veto to attain their own ends (Crowl 2001). Some weaker nations have been coerced or induced by more powerful actors to sign agreements and to vote on issues contrary to their people's best interests (Crowl 2001; Kelleher 2005). In such a highly contested arena dominated by a few elite nations it is difficult for the majority of the world's people to be heard. Individual citizens have no legitimate means of contributing to global decisions in these forums. Only States that have recognised each other through

international treaties are represented at the UN and only heads of these States participate in decision-making.

A further complication in the global governance arena is that, as one distinguished scholar writes, 'there are 2000 nations in 200' States (Galtung 2007:153). The '200' States, more accurately 193 as discussed earlier, generally comprise one dominant nation, the victors of conflicts, and a number of nations who would welcome the ability to access their human right of self-determination. China, for example, is a State that is recognised at the UN and dominates other nations and peoples such as Taiwan and Tibet. If Galtung's estimate is taken literally, this suggests that not only are the views of some 1800 nations and peoples potentially not being heard at the UN General Assembly but of the '200' States eligible to participate in this high-level decision-making forum, just a small minority with the power of veto are actually shaping the agendas on issues that affect the whole planet. These 1800 unrepresented and underrepresented nations and peoples find themselves in this situation largely as a result of being the victims of conflicts. In some of these States conflicts and atrocities are still occurring on a daily basis. From the perspective of social sustainability, it is a situation that threatens the peaceful world that I, as a Grandmother, would like future generations to inherit. It threatens the very survival of some people and cultures.

The Exclusion Zone

Exclusion from global governance arrangements is merely one example of the marginalisation of nations and peoples. As de Sousa Santos (2003) writes, the dominant nations actively produce the non-existence of the dominated and keep them excluded by five means: first, the dominant Western scientific view of knowledge discredits and excludes other ways of knowing, producing nonexistence in the form of ignorance. Second, the

dominant Western nations of the world consider linear time to be correct. People that construct time differently are considered backward 'variously designated as the primitive or savage, closely followed by the traditional, the pre-modern, the simple, the obsolete, the underdeveloped' (de Sousa Santos 2003:15) and may therefore be excluded as lacking credibility. Third, the classification of people that normalises differences and hierarchies enables racial and sexual classifications, for example, to be used as means of exclusion and to create dominator societies. Fourth, the high value placed on the global and the universal ensure that the local and the particular are not considered credible alternatives. Fifth, the principal criteria of commercial productivity and efficiency, applied to nature as well as human labour, 'produces non-existence as non-productiveness ensuring that what is considered non-productive can be discarded' (de Sousa Santos 2003:238-239; de Sousa Santos & Rodriguez-Garavito 2005). For unrepresented nations and peoples these means of exclusion are rendering them invisible to many other nations, producing further challenges to their aims of recognition and self-determination. Their exclusion from global decision-making forums is being actively produced by a global governance system developed by and for Western civilisation.

Increasingly multiple forms of globalisation are bringing nations and peoples into contact with one another with both the potential for peaceful exchanges and the potential for further conflict. Economic globalisation, for example, is eroding the States' power from above as trans-national corporations span national borders with little accountability to the nations and peoples. People power is eroding States' power from below in the forms of international protest marches and individual actions against unpopular and corrupt political figures; both aided by the internet which can be used to organise widespread demonstrations or simply to expose wrong-doing to the millions of people that have access to it. For one writer this attrition of the old world order has led to current world *disorder* (Suter 2003; my emphasis). The world order system of States that began three centuries ago following the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia, which underpins the current global governance structure, is declining and as yet there is no clear alternative to it (Chandler 2009; Falk 2002; Raskin et al. 2002; Suter 2003). Many writers share the view that a new world order is needed yet base their discussions and proposals on the assumption that the State will remain in a central role of any new global governance arrangements (Archibugi & Held 1995; Barnett & Duvall 2004; Chomsky 1997; Falk 1975, 2008; Hawkesworth 2006; Held 1995; Hettne & Oden 2002; Marchetti 2009; OECD 2001; Vayrynen 2002). For Laszlo (1978, 1997, 2006), however, the search for a new world order needs to go beyond States-based systems to explore radically different possibilities. One source of

new thinking might be found in the unheard voices of the 1800 unrepresented nations and peoples.

Amplifying the Unheard Voices

Previous research in the field of global governance has been dominated by Western civilisational images, thinking, institutions, and perceptions of the priority issues facing the world. These include, for example, the reports of the Commission on Global Governance (1995), the edited works of Beres and Targ (1975), scholarly articles and books by Evans et al. (2005), Falk (1975, 1995, 2000; Falk & Strauss 2000), Held (1995, 2004 ; 2005; Held et al. 1999), Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (2002), Korten's *When Corporations Rule the World* (2001), and reports from The Millennium Project (1996-2011). Much of the work available in English also has a relatively short-term perspective. To date, researchers do not appear to have considered the diversity of views envisaged by the Commission on Global Governance or provided the means by which the people of the world might exercise their power to shape the longer-term future. Consequently what is missing from the global governance futures scholarship are opportunities to hear what the voiceless, the marginalised, the excluded and the victims have to say.

There are significant challenges associated with amplifying the unheard voices in hotly contested geopolitical spaces. However one organisation, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), has taken up the challenge. Founded in 1991 by fifteen nations at the Peace Palace in The Hague, the UNPO is an international democratic membership-based organisation created for and by its members to address the impacts of exclusion from major international forums such as the UN General Assembly. UNPO members include indigenous nations and peoples, minorities, unrecognised nations and occupied territories. Their exclusion from such forums significantly limits their ability to participate in international debates, or to access the support of international institutions mandated to defend their rights, protect their environments and alleviate the effects of conflict. They have been forced to the periphery of the international relations system. The UNPO Presidency and Secretariat work to address these consequences of marginalisation and raise the profile of members' suffering which includes attempted genocide, destruction of sacred sites, torture, forced disappearances, execution of peaceful demonstrators, environmental destruction by corporations, and communications embargoes (see www.unpo.org).

The challenges confronting UNPO members and their ongoing struggles for self-determination and peaceful co-existence with the recognised States add different

perspectives to the growing international conversation on global governance futures. My stance here is that drawing on the different ways of knowing of a wide range of people is not simply about being politically correct and inclusive but rather is an opportunity to explore possibilities of new thinking for global governance transformation. Deep in the unheard stories, the veiled myths and metaphors of the human family could lie the means of human survival in the twenty-first century. For Inayatullah:

New time and future metaphors and images have the potential to free us from deterministic and mechanistic thinking and allow us to reintegrate a sense of wonder and stewardship towards the future. How we think about the future determines the way we act in the present and new metaphors and a new narrative could allow us to engage more creatively and perhaps more responsibly with our futures (cited in Green 2007 n.p.).

Resourceful humans across the planet have developed their own survival strategies for local conditions and collectively have the knowledge to use the common affairs of the human family at the dawn of the twenty-first century as catalysts to take humanity to its next societal evolutionary stage. Emerging schools of thought from Indian and Islamic writers, for example, are adding depth to the global governance debate in the form of more spiritual paths to world order (Chandhoke 2002; Kapoor 2007; Sardar 1993; Sarkar 2006; Sen 2006; Shiva 2002). Eastern philosophies have provided catalysts for numerous Western studies into consciousness and explorations of the inner-self as evidenced in the works of Boldt (1999), Dreher (1996), Heider (1985), Wilber (1995, 2000, 2002, 2007). Doubtless there are perspectives in the unheard voices of 1800 unrepresented nations and peoples that would further enrich the discourse. The consideration of these perspectives has the potential to prevent future global governance arrangements from becoming merely a larger Western democracy, or a continued extension of 1980s neoliberalism with its narrow focus on politics and money. Considered from the standpoint of societal evolution, alternative views from the periphery might also yield the spark of creativity needed to ignite the fundamental civilisational shift called for by some writers in response to a growing number of global challenges.

Another World is Possible

Whilst some of the unrepresented nations and peoples are empowering themselves to participate in international conversations through non-violent means, scholars and activists are calling for a more ethical form of globalisation, recognising that neoliberal globalisation has not benefited many of the world's people. Nations and indigenous peoples, including many UNPO members, are not sharing in the world's wealth and many are struggling to survive.

Yet another world is possible if we choose to create it. From the stories, interviews, workshops, presentations and non-violent actions of the UNPO I have pieced together a UNPO preferred global governance future.

In this future, global governance is a reformed UN called 'One World'. The old UN model has been democratised with global civil society admitted to planetary decision making forums through a civil society assembly. Security Council membership has been extended, the power of veto abolished, and 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) measures have been introduced ensuring that genocide is a distant memory and that the human and cultural rights of all people are protected. Swift peacekeeping intervention is now possible in cases of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war, cultural genocide and the like, and R2P initiatives are used to uphold human rights not to increase the power of the already dominant States to interfere in domestic affairs, as discussed extensively by Falk (1975, 2000, 2002, 2008; Falk & Strauss 2000). The decolonisation commission has been reinstated and is negotiating peaceful terms of settlement between nations in conflict over twentieth century settlements. The African continent is receiving priority attention from the commission. 'One World's' democratic and egalitarian decision making processes ensure gender balance in major forums and encourage decentralisation of authority to local levels. This enables the leaders of almost 2000 nations that have accessed their right to self-determination to engage in democratic processes that use communications technologies to facilitate local, regional and planetary participation. Planetary civilisation is taking shape as more people assume the additional layer of identity of planetary citizen and the world becomes a global village.

These reforms are consistent with those called for by scholars, activists, and at the highest levels of the UN. They are consistent with China's UN reform agenda, as reported by Wang and Rosenau (2009). This preferred global governance future, which includes representation of non-State actors in major UN decision-making forums, is also consistent with structural reforms proposed in Galtung's (1995) three Assembly model that includes a People's Assembly, and in Khagram's (2006) architectures for global governance; both would rely on civil society feedback to ensure transparency, participation and accountability. Finally, the reforms that would best align with the interests of unrepresented nations and peoples are congruent with the aspirations of the former UN Secretary General Annan, current Secretary General Moon and the Commission on Global Governance.

Implementing UN Reforms

Moon is particularly keen to implement the R2P initiatives and reduce the risk of a repeat of the massacres in Bosnia, Kosovo or Rwanda. R2P could be utilised to alleviate

considerable suffering in many nations yet there are concerns within the UN membership that this strategy is simply a means of extending the powers of the Security Council, which privileges a small group of economically and politically powerful States. For many unrepresented nations and peoples R2P cannot come soon enough to stop the killings, torture and forced disappearances. In relation to this, and other human rights issues, the historical Westphalian principle of non-intervention within State borders is proving to be a considerable barrier to some nations accessing their human and cultural rights, and their right to self-determination. In that regard, the UN reforms would also need to include the development of new foundational principles to replace the outdated, and now dysfunctional, Westphalian model and facilitate the transition from neoliberalism to neohumanism. As Falk (2008) cautions, however, the UN has previously been unable to adapt to a changing world and seems incapable of reforming itself. It remains driven by Westphalian and neoliberal principles, privileges elite States, and decisions are taken, in the main, by men. Little headway has been made since the announcement of former Secretary General Annan more than a decade ago that the UN would need to reform to remain relevant in a changing world. Organisations such as UNPO and other international non-government organisations and movements could play a vital role in organising pressure groups, from political lobbying to flash-mobs catalysed through the Internet, insisting on reforms being implemented.

Imagine a Peaceful World

For now, the world remains divided by fault lines of conflicts, past and present, and artificially constructed geographical borders. Unstable and unsustainable, it is difficult to imagine a world where nations live in non-violent symbiosis. Nonetheless, inspired and moved by the ongoing struggles of unrepresented nations and their non-violent responses to the threats made against them, I remain hopeful for my grandchildren's futures. As Lennon sang 'imagine all the people, living life in peace. You may say I'm a dreamer but I'm not the only one. I hope some day you'll join us and the world will live as one'.

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