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Global Civil Society

Strategic comments on "the path ahead" discussion paper

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Appreciation

The document [Global Civil Society: the path ahead](#) (2002) by David Korten, Nicanor Perlas and Vandana Shiva, is much to be appreciated as presenting a coherent statement inviting discussion at a critical period in the evolution of understanding about civil society and the alternatives to the dominant worldview. It offers a valuable counterweight to the arguments in support of that worldview and the strategies that it supports. It could also be considered a convenient summary of the arguments of [Alternatives to Economic Globalization: A Better World Is Possible](#) (2002) by the International Forum on Globalization.

The organization of these comments focuses first on the strategic metaphors which appear to frame the advocated approach. The use of "global civil society" by the authors to describe a political movement is then contrasted with its use as a descriptor of the diversity characteristic of the ecosystem of civil society bodies. Concern is then expressed regarding the need for frameworks of disagreement to move beyond the polarization which characterizes the authors' presentation. Questions are then raised as to whether the approach to governance provides for the capacity to make "hard decisions". The authors' recommendation for transitional protected zones for new kinds of socio-economic experiment is then discussed in contrast to mainstream "gated communities". Finally concern is expressed regarding a disappointing tendency towards exclusive appropriation of positive attributes by the "global civil society" movement.

Basis for following comments

In making the comments which follow, it is useful to be clear where they are coming from. For many years I have been responsible for the continuing production and development several reference works of the Union of International Associations. These relate to the concerns of civil society. These include: [Yearbook of International Organizations: guide to global civil society networks](#), profiling some 50,000 bodies and their networks and distributed online; [Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential](#) profiling networks of some 30,000 problems and strategies articulated by such international constituencies and also available online. Over the years I have endeavoured to articulate, through many reports [\[more\]](#), concerns relating to the facilitation of the activity of international networks in response to networks of problems and the challenge of finding new ways of articulating collective understanding of more appropriate strategies, notably through use of richer metaphors [\[more\]](#). More recently I have strongly criticized, at some length, the United Nations initiative in promoting a Global Compact (see ["Globalization": the UN's "Safe Haven" for the World's Marginalized](#)), manipulatively reframing its relationship to civil society, and seeking to marginalize those opposed to its views as "rejectionists".

Strategic metaphors

It is useful to focus on the metaphors that may be understood as underlying the proposed strategic framework. The following metaphors are deliberately explored as a device to reflect the strategic challenge in terms of familiar substantive issues which any complex of global

strategies must necessarily address:

- **Traffic:** The paper is subtitled "the path ahead" as a means of framing the strategic challenge. Others have used such phrases (for example Edward Goldsmith's *The Way: An Ecological World-View* (Themis Books, 1996)). I would like to suggest that one of the major difficulties faced by a complex society is precisely that different constituencies perceive and pursue different paths. The assumption that there is only one way and that it can be articulated in a single document for all is an oversimplification. As in any modern transportation system people believe that they have a need to move in different directions and the strategic challenge can then be framed metaphorically as a traffic problem: how to have lines of (fast moving) traffic crossing each other; how to allow for traffic moving in opposite directions -- as well as the general problem of traffic congestion as more constituencies acquire the ability to acquire strategic vehicles. No modern traffic system has the luxury of being able to require that all traffic move in the same direction -- or else face some kind of penalty. Indeed this metaphor raises the question of what the authors would advocate with regard to people choosing to move in a direction contrary to the one they define to be a requirement for all.
- **Environment:** The traffic metaphor highlights the meta-strategic challenge as being a systemic one, perhaps best exemplified by the environmental ecosystems with which there is so much concern. Can the strategic challenge of interweaving complementary strategies be better understood through environmental disciplines -- especially in the light of the way in which populations of different species correct each other's excesses? The tough aspect of this challenge is that individual strategies, however seemingly appropriate, do not get a free ride -- their excesses are painfully corrected to ensure the sustainability of the larger system. The question is why so little of the understanding of environmental systems is applied in the strategic management of environmental groups which are typically much torn by internal differences [more]. The Green Parties of France and Germany have provided recent examples. The paper does not discuss the existence of such real divisions or the self-organizing processes whereby they are to be managed more fruitfully..
- **Conflict / Peace:** The environmental metaphor points to the fundamental issue of territory. Advocates of particular strategies effectively lay claim to territory in strategic space. This territory is acknowledged and defended in a variety of ways. The authors' articulation of universal values does not address the challenge of other articulations of universal values -- of which religions offer the most classic example. "Turf wars" are as characteristic of the alternative movements as they are of the mindset they would displace. Much experience of the commune movement indicates the nature of the challenge -- as does the highly fragmented nature of major social movements: peace, environment, human rights, etc. The authors do not address the question of how these are to be more creatively managed -- exposing themselves to the accusation of offering a "fair weather" strategy that would not be sufficiently robust when people disagree. It is important to recall that every social movement and religion holds "peace" to be a value -- including those deplored by the authors. This has not prevented millions from being slaughtered in its name. The mindset of those concerned with "security" is not favoured by those concerned with alternative strategies -- and yet there is a need for such thinking if the inadequacies of the deplorable features of current security initiatives are to be replaced by more appropriate approaches. The excesses of "security" in certain sects and the successes of "security" at some demonstrations indicate some of the extremes.
- **Politics / Democracy:** The security metaphor points to the fundamental issue of power and politics. The implication is that through such devices as electronic voting and online democracy differences can be adequately articulated and consensus can be achieved -- despite the many flaws in representative democracy. The authors do not address the challenge of situations in which different constituencies differ radically on particular issues -- as experienced in green parties in dealing in practice with nuclear power, or any conflict between employment and environment. More dramatically perhaps is the situation of pro- and anti-lobbies as in the case of abortion. The implication of the paper is that either people agree or they are not part of "the path ahead" of "global civil society". This raises the question as to how "global civil society" allows for a space for those who do not subscribe to "the path ahead". Are these to be understood as forming "global uncivil society"? One of the difficulties of the alternatives movement is that it is strongest when opposing the "empire" -- as wonderfully demonstrated in the much publicized protests at many recent meetings of the elites of the "empire". It is absolutely unclear whether it can manage power relations between constituencies with different strategic objectives when it has a mandate to do so. The tendency in practice is for those who are dissatisfied to design themselves out of such contexts -- into "global uncivil society". This is not an adequate basis for an alternative to the "empire" which is regrettably successful in handling groups in conflict.
- **Justice / Inequality:** The democracy metaphor points to the fundamental issue of justice and inequality. Democracy as presently understood, and even in its proposed online variant, supposes some adequate access to the democratic processes. It is quite clear that the majority of the globe's citizens do not have remotely equivalent forms of access. The authors do not address the issue of how they are then to be adequately represented in a manner distinct from that currently practiced -- with the vast array of manipulative devices available to those who seek to disrupt the transparency of the process. Those with the resources to travel to Porto Alegre, or to communicate their views around the globe, have a vastly disproportionate influence on the agenda formation of "global civil society". Cheque book democracy is not confined to the elites of the "empire" -- as was only too evident at the Earth Summit in 1992. The authors do not address the various forms of inequality that would undermine the justice of any articulated strategy of global civil society.
- **Education / Health:** The inequality metaphor points to the fundamental issue of how the strategic challenge is to be understood by people enjoying (or suffering from) extreme contrasts in education and health. It is absolutely understandable that those most deprived will favour decisions that address their own immediate short-term concerns. They cannot be expected to have the luxury of indulging in decisions favouring longer time periods and distant peoples -- however much they might acknowledge the need in principle. The authors do not address the implications of different understandings (or types of comprehension) of what the

strategic opportunities may be towards sustainability -- how are the "councils of the wise" to reconcile their views with the clamouring of the "needy". Like governments of the "empire", the authors are to some degree obliged to favour more commonly understandable strategic articulations that may preclude counterintuitive options offering access to a healthier balance within a realistic time-frame. Like governments of the "empire" they too may be forced into a mode of offering "pain today" as the price of desirable outcomes tomorrow -- promises which are so easily and cynically broken in practice as demonstrated in many alternative experiments.

- **Population:** As highlighted with respect to the traffic metaphor, the authors do not deal with the emerging phenomenon of the global information society, namely the extent to which an increasing proportion of the population has the capacity to express and act electronically in support of particular views. Essentially strategic space will be increasingly faced with a "population problem" in which many -- whether groups or individuals -- will have distinct answers to their particular understanding of the problematique and will seek to implement them. As with the way in which many of the issues currently **on the table** are driven by a population problem that has now been successfully designed **off the table**, responses to these issues are increasingly undermined by the number and variety of strategic views formulated by different constituencies -- and the "divine right" of each to continue to formulate more in a basic act of democratic creativity.
- **Employment:** The shift to any alternative to the currently dominant set of strategies will have major impacts on employment. "Empire" has been able to manipulate and control the debate by offering simplistic choices such as "jobs vs environment". The authors do not adequately address the issue of how people and groups are to be employed in an alternative economy that may not have as much economic opportunity as is hoped. In this sense "employment" becomes a valuable metaphor for how people are able to fully employ their time, whether remunerated or not. Traditionally alternative strategies have extolled the merits of crafts and alternative occupations. This may work for some, but will certainly not work for all. Very specifically the test is what new forms of employment will pull people back from urban environments -- in the light of various failed socialist experiments to address this challenge? [[more](#); [more](#)]
- **Pollution:** The authors point to a range of features now usefully acknowledged to be problematic "negative" outcomes of the uncritical pursuit of the dominant paradigm. In this sense they are effectively highlighting a form of "strategic pollution" associated with such strategies. The authors do not raise the question as to whether the pursuit of the strategy they advocate might also give rise to a form of "pollution" -- albeit of a different kind. Is it not the case that the new style of strategy required by the challenges of complex society must necessarily be capable of addressing any form of strategic pollution -- and the accumulation of negative by-products of particular modes of action? This surely is the merit of a set of complementary strategies that together are capable of "cleaning up" their own problematic strategic outcomes. The assumption that the advocated strategy is somehow "problem free" could be construed as an indicator of the immaturity of the strategy. The failure to discuss any "strategic shadow" suggests -- in psychotherapeutic terms -- that aspects of that shadow would tend to be projected onto others. This raises the issue of whether the authors' negative stereotyping of "empire" is entirely to be associated with the inadequacies of the dominant paradigm or whether it is not in some measure engendered by the mindset advocating the alternative.
- **Shelter:** The authors usefully point to the possibility of creating "local cultural zones within which people can experiment" and "zones of freedom" -- namely a form of shelter to protect emerging alternatives -- as is done by the dominant paradigm in the case of special "economic zones", R&D laboratories, and fiscal advantages (including tax havens). But, just as with the housing problem in many societies, it is useful to raise the question of where and how what kinds of shelter should be engendered for such experiment. Should they be basic "housing for the masses" to allow many to experiment? Should they be on "green field sites" minimally constrained by the existing problems of society? And to what extent are ideal shelters provided by intentional communities and "centres of excellence" -- the classic approach to alternative community -- a necessary part of the mix?

Descriptor vs Political movement

The main title of the paper, *"global civil society"*, raises issues which the authors fail to address. As many have remarked, "civil society" has now become a phrase which is readily attached to the most disparate preoccupations. It is being successfully used by some to replace "NGOs" -- a term like "non-whites" with pejorative connotations that has been well-exploited to marginalize the bodies to which the label has been attached, whether they identified with the label or not.

There are other threads however that are only alluded to in passing by the authors.

- **Popular movements:** As became evident in 1992 at the Earth Summit, prime importance is increasingly attached to movements without any formal structure -- variously termed "citizens movements" or "peoples movements". Indeed these may be perceived as more worthy than those that have been tainted by the distortions of formal structure (secretariats, committees, officers, budgets, operating procedures, and the like). Ultimately, as indicated by the authors, any individual is a member of global civil society -- and such membership is especially empowered if that person is well-resourced. The authors see such popular movements -- civil rights, women's, peace, human rights, environment, gay rights, among others -- as drawing their inspiration from national liberation movements as uniquely concerned with "transformation of relationships" to the "partnership model". This focus raises questions as to the what kinds of bodies can articulate the views of such movements and how such bodies -- when they emerge -- will relate to one another and to others that already exist -- and may lay some claim to being part of global civil society
- **Academic lag and self-citation:** A second thread is the manner in which "civil society" has been so recently "discovered" as a

phenomenon by the academic community, where previously many of the same bodies (under labels such as "voluntary associations" and "NGOs") were considered by most social science disciplines to be of little interest. It is not clear that the academic world has acknowledged the forces driving this recognition and its methodological failure in responding to this phenomenon in the past -- which suggests the possibility of analogous processes undermining the appropriateness of its response to the phenomenon under the label "civil society". A feature of the current academic preoccupation with "civil society" is its tendency to engage in self-citation. Concepts relating to "civil society" and "networks", originated and developed in other contexts, and other times are "discovered" and given particular meanings within a self-selected group. This does not call for criticism except where the authority of academe is then used to reframe all discourse on "civil society" according to this limited perspective.

- **Nontransparent funding complicity:** A third thread is the complicity of foundations funding research on civil society and the plethora of meetings on the topic following the fall of the Soviet Union. The need to enhance the fabric of "civil society" in Eastern Europe became a feature of western intervention in those countries once the weaknesses of the politico-economical programs advocated through the dominant mindset became evident. It remains unclear however the extent to which preoccupation with "civil society" by foundations is not driven by particular western political agendas seeking to implant, through a conceptual Trojan horse, a particular "way of life" in other countries by endeavoring to associate "civil society" with "democracy" at a time when the latter term is being used cynically to disguise a variety of forms of democratic deficit. It is curious, for example, the weight of the USA-UK axis, within western thinking, in defining "civil society" for the rest of the world. This is especially problematic at a time when that axis is undertaking a particularly strong initiative to reframe international perceptions of "terrorism" and what is effectively the notion of "uncivil society" -- an initiative from which few foundations can afford to dissociate themselves. The question that might be asked is whether those seeking to reframe "civil society" in their own image are seeking to exclude those that hope in future to stigmatize as "uncivil", perhaps to be acted against in the light of anti-terrorist legislation. The well-documented example of distinguishing "non-whites" in South Africa as a basis for the later apartheid laws merits continuing reflection. Most curious is that these issues are not debated in relation to "civil society" -- notably by those who in the past were most sensitive to use of academic research as a front for other agendas.
- **Civil society camouflage:** A fourth thread is the manner in which many governmental and business institutions are now associating their initiatives with "civil society" as a cynical public relations "look good" exercise to disguise the failures of initiatives conceived with an outmoded mindset. In this sense "civil society" has become a form of camouflage for advancing "business as usual".
- **Neglect of integrative function of global:** A fifth thread is the possibility that there are other interpretations of "global" that emphasize more the challenges of integrating disparate perspectives into a larger whole. Conventional "global" has focused on the geographic implications of relating activities on territories around the planet. The challenge of interrelating sectors based on different cultures, jargons, and ideologies has been downplayed. The authors effectively bring into the same use of global as that employed by the dominant paradigm -- at a time when it is alternative insights into ways of bridging between differences (other than by an airline flight) that are called for. [[more](#)]

The interference effects between these different threads has not helped clarify the nature of "civil society" which increasingly has the fuzzy positive attributes of "motherhood statements" beyond any reasonable challenge or criticism.

In this context, the point to be made here is that the authors fail to distinguish between:

- the wide variety of bodies in global civil society that articulate the views of individuals and groups in every field of human activity -- where "global civil society" is understood as a complex social ecosystem; and
- "global civil society" as a particular set of bodies and individuals selected because of the consensus they represent as expressed by the authors

In the first case above "global civil society" is used as a **descriptor** of an ecosystem whatever the varied strategies to which the constituent bodies subscribe. In the second case "global civil society" is a broad-based **political movement** which has appropriated the descriptive term, apparently for its own **exclusive** use. It clearly has the right to endeavour to do so, as in any marketing endeavour to lay optimistic claim to be the "best" product with which positive values are uniquely and exclusively associated. The authors deliberately appropriate the term to this end in statements like "global civil society emerged as a major social force in the final decade of the Second Millennium" -- thus obscuring the nature of its existence and activity prior to that time.

Is such "emergence" of global civil society to be understood like the tip of an iceberg of multifarious processes at every level of society to which little attention is normally given -- or is it a highly mediated movement floating on the surface of public opinion and only elusively related to the real activities of citizens around the world? As with "NGOs", how many bodies relate to "global civil society" as a political movement, as opposed to being involved in a wide variety of global processes (including those beyond the preoccupation of the authors) for which "civil society" might indeed be an appropriate descriptor? Is it useful to stress the confrontational aspect of "global civil society" as a movement and a "threat" to "empire" -- thus obscuring the global role of civil society in sustaining the fabric of global society?

This then raises the key issue of the descriptors to be attached to two distinct sets of bodies:

- those bodies who do not subscribe to the "universal values" articulated by the authors and wish to dissociate themselves from the agenda of their "global civil society" movement -- whether or not they subscribe to the agenda of the "empire"
- those bodies that the "global civil society" movement does not wish to have associated with its agenda because it judges them

(through some duly authorized body empowered to do so) as pursuing strategies that undermine that agenda, whether or not the bodies protest against such judgement

The challenge is then not so much what is included under the label of "global civil society" but what is in practice **excluded** whether explicitly or implicitly [[more](#); [more](#)]. Interesting test cases might include:

- sects (eg the Rael Movement, recently publicized for its cloning of humans),
- political associations holding views at variance with "universal values" (Klu Klux Klan, etc)
- recreational associations; sporting clubs and federations,
- philosophical societies
- art and musical appreciation societies
- trade and commercial associations
- professional associations
- religious orders
- pro- and anti- bodies (abortion, hunting, meat-eating, smoking, etc)
- illegal associations, liberation movements, and those defined as terrorist
- secret societies
- racist groups (neo-Nazis, etc)
- etc

The groups most attentive to the defence of such borderline cases are bodies like the American Civil Liberties Union ([ACLU](#)). It is not clear whether the authors would subscribe so forthrightly to the defence of the right to exist of bodies with whose views they fundamentally disagree. Nor is it clear what place they would give to them in "the path ahead" given their often destabilizing influence on the desirable strategy the authors endeavour to articulate.

Elsewhere the clarification of what is variously understood as involved in "civil society" has been discussed under the heading of "definitional game-playing" [[more](#)]. The term "conceptual gerrymandering" is also useful in that respect -- notably as applied in the case of "terrorism" [[more](#)], with which powerful forces are endeavouring to taint any initiative in favour of alternatives to the dominant paradigm. Given the current overriding appeal for a crusade against "evil", should the authors have done more to distinguish between "good" civil society and "evil" civil society to address the taint cast upon those "rejectionist" variants that do not subscribe wholeheartedly to the political framing of those opposed to the dominant paradigm?

But the conceptual issue is whether the authors effectively adopt an equivalent to the current American government strategy of "all who are not with us are against us". Given that those who are at the Davos Forum are considered as more central to the "empire" -- are those at Porto Alegre more part of "global civil society" than those who are absent? Are all who do not subscribe to the authors' articulation of "the path ahead" necessarily to be considered as opposing it, namely as sympathetic with the "empire" whose strategies the authors deplore? Such binary thinking is much to be regretted in a complex society where the tools to deal with complexity are becoming more readily available.

Who defines civil society?

The most intriguing feature of "civil society" is the way in which various constituencies consider that they have a special competence and right to define what it is -- and attach descriptors. The authors do it in their paper. Scholars of civil society do it. Journalists do it. Intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations do it. Increasingly governments and political parties do it. Thus for the UN Joint Inspection Unit:

"A 'Civil Society' is the result of different components of populations and communities, and refers to the sphere in which citizens and social initiatives organise themselves around objectives, constituencies and thematic interests. They act collectively through their organisations known as Civil Society Organisations which include movements, entities, institutions autonomous from the State which in principle, are non-profit-making, act locally, nationally and internationally, in defence and promotion of social, economic and cultural interests and for mutual benefit. They intermediate between their constituencies/members, with the State as well as with United Nations bodies. They do this through lobbying and/or provision of services. Though belonging to the non-State actor category, they are different from the private sector and NGO as they may not be registered, may replace the public sector, are not always structured and often their members are not officially recognized".

There is no mention here of those bodies opposing policies favoured by the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions and which had previously been labelled "rejectionist". Does the fact that they strongly object to some of these policies imply that they are beyond the pale of bodies to be defined as "civil"? How to distinguish between varying degrees of rejection, up to the degree implied by Al-Qaida -- as being part of "civil" society or not? What is the nature of "uncivil" society? Are those who make such judgements to be considered part of civil society?

And yet perhaps one of the most characteristic features of civil society is the lack of connection in the minds of "civil society bodies" with the label "civil society" as attached to them by any of the labelling bodies above. In fact it might be said that the very politicization of the process of defining "civil society" is indicative of the manner in which those to whom the label may be attached feel free at any time to define "civil society" in new ways that suit them -- and consider as irrelevant or outmoded the views of others on their mode of action or organization.

In this sense we may be witnessing a vital new phenomenon that echoes other developments in institutions and society. The phenomenon

was perhaps first seen with respect to religion in that people now feel increasingly free to select or define their own religion -- much to the dismay of those who consider this heresy. It is seen in relation to "science" in that many now feel free to choose between explanations of different disciplines or schools of thought -- or to elaborate their own explanations of phenomena, even using "pseudo-science". It is evident in the case of ideology. But the very notion of "alternatives" enhances the significance of this phenomenon in the case of social processes and modes of organization. Just as the notion of the nuclear family has rapidly evolved in a variety of ways over the past century, the notion of how to associate with others in groups, movements, partnerships and institutions is evolving according to different preferences.

Any body may now empower itself to pronounce on the nature of social reality to whatever audience it can gather and propagandize. If sufficiently empowered it may get legislation or social sanction to back up such distinctions and judgements -- or may seek to impose them by force.

But the most interesting feature of this is that those who seek to capture and freeze the living reality of others in this manner may be deluding themselves in very intriguing ways -- however coherently satisfying their discourse amongst those with whom they share their chosen perspective. Authoritative labels and maps may indeed be issued, but the members of "civil society" may neither be constrained nor guided by such devices -- perceived as outmoded and irrelevant -- and may function according to emerging guides and dynamics best characterized as "alternative". The social construction of reality may well have become so dynamic and variegated that efforts to describe what "civil society" is are somewhat equivalent to the the approach of generals of the classic period elaborating rigid military strategy in response to the shifting patterns of guerilla warfare. This is especially ironic for the USA whose military liberation was achieved by the alternative strategies of the guerilla forces facing the British redcoats -- a problem it now also faces in the "new kind of warfare" against terrorists using other modes of organization.

Frameworks for disagreement: beyond polarization

Like it or not, modern society has been somewhat successful in developing processes to deal with disagreement -- prior to the drama of 11th September. In fact the bodies most characteristic of "empire" have been successful precisely because of their ability to do so with increasing sophistication. Businesses typically have teams of people who work reasonably effectively even though team members may have little appreciation for each other. Is this the case with alternative movements who seem to favour a tendency for each to go off and "do their own thing" when consensus and agreement become elusive?

It is clear however that methods available to government and business for working with disagreement are no longer adequate to the challenge of the variety of constituencies -- as especially typified by "terrorists". The question is whether the authors can be considered as having articulated an approach that would be more successful in dealing with a wide range of disagreement so as to enable coherent strategies and initiatives to emerge where possible.

The authors discuss with approval the development of consensus with respect to their articulation of an alternative. But they do not distinguish any such process from that famously labelled by Noam Chomsky as the [Manufacture of Consent](#) (1987).

Specifically they appear to make no provision for an "opposition" as a valuable corrective to any future excesses of the strategy they advocate. More precisely, moving beyond a binary parliamentary model, how are groups with varying strategic commitments -- including even the strongest opposition to one another -- to be provided with an appropriate governance framework? How is opposition to be designed in -- to get the requisite variety for governance in complex situations? Is it to be assumed that optimal governance from the authors' alternative perspective is to be based on the absence of "opposition" in any form to the authors' articulation -- and reliance on "yes men" (or women)? Alternatively, if every viewpoint is to be welcomed, by what structures and processes are incompatible viewpoints to be reconciled?

The tone of the paper is characterized by a level of certainty and lack of doubt which is unusual for any group informed of the complexity of the challenges of the problematique and the human frailties of those who aspire to govern -- even with the best intentions. The lack of doubt concerning the merits of their insights and the capacity of any to govern in the light of them could be construed as a warning. For those who have had to deal with the arrogance of government officials over many failed Development Decades, this is more than a warning.

Whilst it may indeed be an important tactical device, the authors' presentation of the challenge in terms of an "epic struggle" between "two deeply conflicting world views" may well be unfortunate. It precisely echoes the binary thinking much criticized in the current American approach to "terrorism" -- "either you are with us or you are against us". In both cases the possibility that the drama of the times may have more than two sides is denied. In both cases there is a "right" side and a "wrong" side -- readily associated with "good" and "evil". This mindset favours the defeat of the current "dominating" paradigm -- with the emergence of the advocated alternative as the new dominant paradigm. In such terms this is not a change of mindset, just a change of dominator.

The discussion of the dynamics of the "epic struggle" would be more relevant if it recognized the extent to which the opposing forces are actually also features of every personality. There are too many examples of "empire" being manifest in charismatic manipulative leaders of alternative movements. There are also many examples of the force for "community" being very effectively represented in those one might otherwise love to hate. The challenge is how such simplistic polarization is to be transcended within richer frameworks -- whether for the individual, for groups, or for society as a whole [\[more\]](#). The authors avoid this issue by appealing to transcendental values when it is their embodiment that has traditionally been the stumbling block.

It is unfortunate, whatever the tactical merits, that the authors rely on military metaphors [\[more\]](#) in articulating the challenge: "empire under siege". Clearly, in the birth of their "global civil society", the close association with confrontation with the security forces of "empire" must necessarily condition strategic thinking. The question is whether as a political movement it has any strategic resources to think alternatively in dealing with those that it defines as its enemies and targets. Can it demonstrate the capacity to form new kinds of

partnerships with those that do not wholly identify with its agenda? What is to be learnt from ecosystemic relationships in this respect?

The war against terrorism can be considered an ultimate failure of global dialogue, and as an incapacity to develop methods of dialogue with opponents -- other than those based on terror and torture. The question must be raised as to whether "global civil society" can create environments in which new styles of dialogue are possible with "imperialists", with those opposed or indifferent to the changes sought, and between those with differing strategic views of appropriate change -- even when they claim to share values.

The "empire" that the authors criticize derives much of its strength and coherence from its exploitation of inequality. Can the movement that the authors represent avoid the trap of deriving its strength and coherence from opposition to those with contrasting values -- rather than from the quality and dynamism of the pattern of relationships amongst those with limited basis for consensus?

Hard decisions

Both government and business, like it or not, have learnt to deal realistically (in their terms) with the tough decisions -- of their choice. Their manner of doing so has evoked the legitimate protest of the authors. But the question remains as to whether any alternative approach to governance could elaborate a better approach to such decisions -- and to other decisions they might not wish to consider. Hard decisions have tended in the past to be extremely divisive in "positive" social movements -- and hence their fragmentation to avoid having to deal with them.

As indicated earlier, it is relatively easy to agree on abstract values like "peace" or "love" -- when there is no operational challenge to be dealt with in practice. It is quite another matter when groups have to act out of contrasting interpretations of such values without the possibility of focusing their frustrations on an evil "empire" that can be readily blamed for their inadequacies..

Similarly it is relatively easy to agree that something like "pollution", "violence" or "discrimination" is deplorable. Again, it is quite another matter when groups find themselves with different interpretations of what constitutes "pollution" and what should be done about it -- and by whom, and at whose expense.

The danger is that the authors text will succeed as a "manifesto" appealing to values in ways that do not need to be tested in practice. Cruelly put, the text could be characterized as an excellent manifesto for protest (*manifestation* in French) **against** "empire". But how could it better incorporate dimensions that would enable new forms of governance **for** constituencies with conflicting preoccupations?

Hard decisions are brought to a focus in issues of security when some have to be judged as inappropriate and constrained by others. The security forces of "empire" have continued to act excessively in many instances, compounding the miscarriages of justice that support them -- and have been criticized for doing so. The question for any alternative approach to governance is what new insights would enable a practical alternative approach to security consistent with the universal values articulated by the authors. There are relatively few case studies of security policies implemented by alternative groups. The well-publicized example of the Rajneesh group in Antelope is not encouraging. More concretely, the authors could usefully have touched upon the challenge of increasing prison populations as illustrating one unsatisfactory approach to dealing with those opposed to the dominant paradigm. Would they seek to imprison those who defiantly continue to practice according to the mindset of "empire"?

"Gated communities"

A fundamental weakness in the text is the absence of case studies demonstrating unambiguously and in practice the viability of the arguments made. This point can be countered in several ways:

- there are instances of social experiments based on alternative socio-economic principles and these have indeed been documented. The difficulty with these experiments, and the documentation of them, is that they are not considered to be sufficiently solid and persuasive as evidence to be replicated. The body of such evidence has not been the subject of analysis in support of the design of alternatives to the dominant paradigm.
- enthusiasm for such experiment models is now not such as to persuade significant numbers of those sympathetic with alternative economic paradigms to commit to them in practice -- in contrast with enthusiasm for communes in the 1960s and 1970s.
- any such experiments, when they have acquired any degree of credibility, have been undermined by external forces determined to ensure that their viability does not become apparent. Whatever the other flaws, this was a factor in the failure of Nyerere's experiment in Tanzania. Allende's Chile did not have the opportunity to be proven a success or a failure.
- in contrast with subsidized experiments in support of the dominant economic paradigm, notably in the form of "special economic zones", no effort is made to support experimental alternatives to the dominant economic paradigm. The Grameem Bank is an interesting exception.
- the authors specifically recommend the creation of "local cultural zones within which people can experiment". A case could however have been made to recognize the existence of such zones where people are already endeavouring to experiment.

It is interesting that the failures of the dominant paradigm, in the eyes of its elites, is encouraging the privileged to relocate to "gated communities" to protect their socio-economic lifestyle. Such gated communities are the counterpart to the experimental communities which have been an inspiration to those in search of alternatives to that paradigm. There are even suggestions to extend this nation-wide - as with the "fortress America" and "fortress NAFTA" concepts.

The authors give valuable attention to the possibility of creating viable transition zones protected from the disruptive forces of the dominant paradigm. Without linking the suggestions to demonstration initiatives, these beg the question as to whether the alternative strategies recommended are as robust and attractive as the authors claim. So many well-intentioned initiatives of every dimension have collapsed or degraded that a more realistic assessment of such possibilities is required.

Exclusive appropriation

The underlying thrust of the authors' paper may be interpreted as making a degree of exclusive claim which reduces the merit of the argument as a whole. Special claims are associated with:

- **unique political concern** with regard to the future of the planet and humanity. Many bodies outside their movement have struggled over decades with these concerns. It is possible that their apparent failure precludes them from being credible partners in future. But they have not gone away and are unlikely to do so.
- **unique analysis of the problematique.** Again many have produced such analyses using different skills and methodologies. Are they to be considered either "with global civil society" as defined by the authors, or against them? To what extent have the authors recognized the merits of concerns deriving from other methodologies?
- **unique insight into universal values.** Again many movements, especially religions, claim insights into universal values. There are considerable difficulties in reconciling such insights. The contrast between the unifying themes of any *Global Ethic* and the many religious wars at any given time makes the point.
- **unique power base.** Whilst many have appreciated the dedication exhibited by those protesting at international meetings around the world, the power base of the protesters is a very particular one. There are other power bases and constituencies working variously to the improvement of the common good -- according to their particular understanding of it. The political challenge is surely to interweave such initiatives rather than to alienate many in highlighting the strengths of some -- and avoiding any discussion of their relative weaknesses.
- **unique capacity to self-organize.** This capacity has been much admired with respect to protest and opposition. But the ability of this claimed "previously unknown capacity to self-organize" and its "capacity for self-governance" has yet to be demonstrated with respect to hard decisions imposing unwelcome constraints on some, with respect to the longer time periods characteristic of many human initiatives, and to the activities of a self-sustaining community -- challenges with which other groups have had to deal.
- **authenticity.** The authors make valuable points regarding the "power of authentic culture". As with any embodiment of transcendental values, it is in practice over the longer period that their meaning emerges. It is unfortunate that authenticity is not more clearly recognized as characteristic of many in different walks of life instead of being so particularly linked to the global civil society movement.

Such exclusivity is effectively set aside by the authors through the claim that "every person" is a leader of "global civil society". But this raises many undiscussed issues about the ways in which some are more empowered than others to polarize society's relationship to others -- at a time when there is widespread recognition that such polarization needs to be creatively transcended through new modes of thought and behaviour that the best and the brightest appear to have considerable difficulty in demonstrating in practice.

Others have commented on the dangers of the claims made by exclusive, or specially chosen peoples, who see themselves as having a special mission that sets them apart from the peoples of the world. This is a trap that could have been usefully avoided -- if "global civil society" is not to imitate the patterns, and repeat the historical errors, of those it so legitimately criticizes.

Perhaps this critique of the authors' articulation of global civil society can be most succinctly expressed by the concern that the movement is to a dangerous degree entrapped by the process described in the myth of Narcissus and his self-admiration [[more](#)]. There is no question of the "beauty" of the preoccupations of the movement. The challenge comes in its relation to the "bestly" qualities of "empire". Rather than seeking to destroy or imprison the beast according to conventional mindsets. In mythological terms again, this challenge might be usefully explored by extending the movement's preoccupation with partnerships and alliances to that of arranging a new kind of marriage between Beauty and the Beast [[more](#)].

Gaian democracies

The perspective of the Korten-Perlas-Shiva text is echoed and elaborated in a well-structured book by Roy Madron and John Jopling (*Gaian Democracies: redefining globalisation and people-power*. Green Books for [The Schumacher Society](#), 2003). This is not the place to comment in detail on this valuable work. The point to be made however is that, like the Korten-Perlas-Shiva text, it successfully adopts a posture of documenting the failures of the mainstream approach and recommending a much-to-be-welcomed people-power approach.

But the Madron-Jopling study avoids any reference to challenges inherent in the people-power approach -- as so amply demonstrated by the fragmentation and problematic dynamics of the peace movement and of the environmental movement. It is not the fragmentation that is a cause for concern in itself but the assumptions made that coherent governance of any kind can emerge from such dynamics -- and that checks and balances can be successfully implemented and sustained in response to personality issues, free loaders, empire builders, and sophisticated exercises in manipulation and fraud. In fact it appears to be assumed that those associated with people power are in some way beyond such characteristics, that tend to be so charmingly described as "human nature". Or again, as with mainstream manifestations of such problems, they are framed as "exceptional" and in no way justifying criticism of the system that sustains them -- and usually ensures the impunity of the major offenders.

The assumptions of people-power advocates are humorously illustrated by a story regarding a pope presented with the plans for a splendid new seminary -- which he inspected with great attention. Finally he is reported to have inquired of the architects whether the

seminarians were angels. When the architects were unable to comprehend the purpose of the question, the pope asked why there were no toilets in the whole building. The question to be asked of the visionaries of Gaian democracy -- especially in the light of the value they attach to environmental systems and sensitivities -- is how the effluent of "human nature" is to be integrated into such psycho-social systems.

In the case of the Global Monotocracy, so effectively criticized by Madron-Jopling, the "shit" is only too evident. But Gaian Democracy would seem to be for people "without shit" -- or "without shadows" from a Jungian perspective. From the latter perspective, this would be seen to be the exemplification of immaturity and lack of realistic understanding of the world and how communities and individuals operate within it. Surely there is a need to recognize the maturity of those who struggle valiantly with their own shadows and have to endeavour to compensate for leaders who derive their strength in large part from denying their own. Or is it to be assumed that both leaders and followers in Gaian Democracy will be "angels"?

Such a perspective can be usefully contrasted with the set of [Viridian Principles](#), which include:

- **"Look at the Underside First"** Legions of people are paid large sums to promote the positive aspects of commercially available products. Very few people earn their daily bread by pointing out malfunctions, bugs, screw-ups, design failures, side-effects and the whole sad galaxy of trade-offs and failings that are inherent in any technological artifact. To counteract this gross social imbalance, a wise designer and a wise critic will make it a matter of principle to look at the underside first.
- **"Design For Evil"** Any innocent product which becomes suddenly genocidal in the hands of a tyrant has been designed by a dangerous naïf. Every design process is incomplete unless it takes into careful consideration what could be done with the product by a dictatorial megalomaniac in command of a national economy, a secret police, and a large army.

The reality of these issues should be explored in the light of the percentage of the population incarcerated in the world's exemplar of democracy -- and the percentage of the population there with a criminal record. Whether or not such a degree of incarceration and criminalization could be avoided in a people-power democracy, the challenge of managing activity that cannot be contained without incarceration needs to be addressed in any realistic proposal. This is especially the case because of the systemic isomorphism between recycling -- to be emphasized in a Gaian democracy -- and re-education and recidivism. More challenging however is the extent to which people-power democracies are vulnerable to non-democratic exploitation in the name of democracy and under the guise of populism. How is the emergence of such exploitation to be detected, its denial unmasked and effective remedial action to be undertaken? Is it seriously believed that intelligent and devious groups would be unable (in the name of the people and in the guise of principles they value) to manipulate societies, however decentralized, in ways that would be as bad (or worse) than in the current Global Monotocracy?

What next?

The Korten-Perlas-Shiva text was the subject of a comment by James Robertson ([posted with it](#)) who also commented privately on the above text. Beyond expressing general agreement with many of the arguments above, the key point he makes is to question whether the critique above **"will help people to see what they should do if they want to play a part in bringing the human race on to a less damaging and destructive path of development than the one we are on now"**.

The above commentary on the Korten-Perlas-Shiva text was not designed with this as a prime objective. Rather it endeavoured to highlight modes of articulation which could contribute directly to inhibiting the emergence of viable approaches to **"help people to see what they should do"**. There is no question but that the successful **opposition** to "empire" has forced the arrogant to listen and to worry -- and made them appreciate the extent to which they have lost most of the intellectual arguments.

The challenge comes with the need to move beyond opposition. It is at this point that the principled coherence of "global civil society" fragments in ways that are less than fruitful at the concrete level of praxis. Whilst the movement may be able to manage its opposition, it is far from clear that it can manage many of the functions which society currently relies on "empire" to handle. Thoughtful reservations regarding the necessity for some global organization of the movement have been expressed by George Monbiot ([Stronger Than Ever](#), *Guardian*, 26 January 2003):

Most of the movement believes that the best means of regaining control over political life is through local community action. A smaller faction (to which I belong) believes that this response is insufficient, and that we must seek to create democratically accountable global institutions. The debates have, so far, been muted. But when they emerge, they will be fierce.

The democratic challenge for the movement is the concern of Naomi Klein ([Cut the Strings](#), *Guardian*, 1 February 2003) who sees the lengthy speechifying by "big men", at the most recent meeting of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, as exemplifying what the movement was seeking to move beyond.

Most specifically the movement has failed to demonstrate an ability to manage problematic issue areas in which constituencies favouring opposing strategies compete for scarce resources. Worse still, there is a marked tendency to systematically deny this and point to vague areas of principled agreement. "Global Plans" of every shape, size and detail may be offered in response. The challenge lies in why their take up is inadequate to the need.

The challenge of "what next" -- beyond the last demo -- calls for "new ways of thinking". Again there are many such on offer, again without any means of reconciling their incompatibilities in practice. Religions have demonstrated the tragic consequences, despite the dedication of their adherents.

My preferred suggestion in response to this challenge is the use of richer metaphor to enable articulation of richer and more appropriate strategies at any level -- whether in their conception, their comprehension or their execution, and specifically to provide the subtle

connective tissue between what may appear to be incompatible initiatives. I have produced many papers on this indirect approach to sustaining the viability of alternatives (<https://www.laetusinpraesens.org/themes/azmetap.php>) in relation to global governance (<https://www.laetusinpraesens.org/themes/azstrat.php>).

Perhaps of most relevance to the above critique is the light-hearted suggestion that we might consider how many complementary "languages" we need to sustain global governance, starting with four (see <https://www.laetusinpraesens.org/musings/langfour.php>) each with its great strengths and weaknesses. How about:

- **Pozzy:** This is the language in which everything must be expressed positively. Great for political correctness. This is the language of hope-mongers -- unfortunately also the direct cause of the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster (the manufacturers, as in many modern organizations, discouraged upward reporting of problems).
- **Neggy:** This is the negative, critical language typical of newspaper reporting and general cynicism. The language of doom-mongers. Useful to have around if you want to fix infrastructure problems (pipe-leaks, broken-legs, etc) where a good diagnosis is essential to rapid remedial action. Does not seem to be able to deal with wider global challenges.
- **Luvvy:** This is the language in which everything is based on love and being lovely. Implicit and unquestioning belief in brotherhood, sisterhood, solidarity, community and the like. Great as a basis for initiating relationships. Tends to be at an extreme loss in recognizing or dealing with nasty situations, Saddam Hussein's, etc. Poor at sustaining relationships through their bad patches.
- **Tuffy:** This is the tough language of the corporate, military and gang worlds -- the bulldozer language of "empire". Certainly achieves things, including the need for other styles to compensate for its insensitivities.

Such four-fold systems have long been a feature of psychometric testing of individuals -- based on the work of Jung, Myers-Briggs and Hermann. Most recently attention has been given by the Cognosis Consulting Group to a "Four Worlds" framework extending such approaches, and applying them to the "personality" of organizations (see Alex Benady. *Organisations, too, can be put on the couch*. *Financial Times*, 20 June 2003). This recognizes the critical importance of the "culture" of an organization -- none of which is considered better than another, although possibly one may be better suited to a particular style of challenges. What might this suggest in the case of the people-power initiatives of civil society? The four types they distinguish are:

- Rational: logical and ingenious
- Sympathetic harmoniser
- Pragmatic: focused on the here and now
- Idealist: enthusiastic and insightful

Regarding, pozzy, neggy, luvvy and tuffy, the cited article suggests a further four languages. From this perspective, the Korten-Perlas-Shiva text was written in Pozzy --contrasting its preoccupations with use of Tuffy by "empire" -- and speaking for many who communicate best using Luvvy. The above comment is written in Neggy -- like many of David Korten's critiques. Within what language would one discuss the necessary movement between languages? In what language would one expect to understand the conclusion? How would one expect to combine insights from different languages? How does translation work? What if some group insists on speaking "French" when "everyone" is "of course" believed to understand "English"? Relying on any one language as a means of governing the world -- or oneself -- would seem to be a recipe for disaster.

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