

Democracy Versus Diversity?

BENJAMIN BARBER

Sažetak

Mnogi ljudi smatraju da su demokratija i demokratizacija pojedinačnih država i svijeta u cijelini ključ za postizanje pravde, mira i stabilnosti; ključ za uspostavljanje multikulturalnosti i promoviranja pomirenja. Ja bih želio dati neke provizorne odgovore na pitanja o demokratiji: najprije pitajući se šta demokratija znači u današnjem svijetu, te preispitati vezu između demokratije i različitosti tj. etničke, vjerske, rasne i ine šarolikosti. Demokratija ima autohtonu historiju u svakom dijelu svijeta i pojavljivala se u formama koje prevazilaze današnji Zapad. To je put kojim se ljudi oslobodaju unutar postojećih društvenih sistema; put za postizanje nezavisnosti, oslanjajući se na sopstvenu kulturu i historiju.

Želio bih se osvrnuti na problem koji, do sada, nije bio konfrontiran, a koji definira srž ove konferencije u Sarajevu: problem različitosti. Sloboda, oslobođenje i demokratija, vrlo često, mogu također osloboditi patološke strane različitosti koje diktature drže pod kontrolom. Naravno, problem moderne masovne demokratije, htjeli mi to ili ne, mora se suočiti sa različitostima, pluralizmom i podijeljenim društvima, gdje ljudi imaju malo zajedničkog.

Demokratija se tako iznenada nađe konfrontirana sa novom društvenom stvarnošću, definiranom razlikama i podijeljenom pluralizmom. Demokratija u multikulturalnom, multinacionalnom svijetu treba biti shvaćena u kontekstu uzajamne međuovisnosti. Cilj demokratije nije samo da regulira narode, nego da regulira odnose između naroda. Sa uzajamnom međuovisnošću i globalizacijom kao neminovnim realnostima, ukoliko ne demokratiziramo globalizaciju i globaliziramo demokratiju, demokratija je sklona propadanju u okviru pojedinačnih država i naroda – kako na lokalnom tako i na globalnom nivou.

Abstract

Many people have argued that democracy and democratizing both individual nations and the world is the key to justice, peace and stability, the key to establishing diversity and even to promoting reconciliation. I would like to pose some possible provisional answers to some of the questions that can be asked about democracy: first, by asking what democracy might mean in today's world and then by questioning the relationship between democracy and diversity.

Democracy has an indigenous history in each part of the world, and has appeared in unlikely forms beyond the West. It is a way that people find to liberate themselves within their society; a way to achieve self-government, relying on their own culture and history. I want to address the issue that, until now, has not been confronted, the issue that defines the heart of our conference here in Sarajevo: the problem of diversity. Freedom, liberation, and democracy have a way of unleashing the pathological sides of diversity in ways that dictatorship prevents. The problem of modern mass democracy is, of course, that like it or not, it must contend with diverse, pluralistic, disintegral societies where people have little in common.

Democracy suddenly finds itself facing a new social reality defined by difference and inflected by diversity, divided by pluralism. Democracy in a multicultural, multinational world has to be understood in a context of interdependence. Democracy is not just to regulate nations but to regulate what happens among nations. With interdependence and globalization as our realities, if we do not either democratize globalization, or globalize democracy, democracy is likely to fail within nations – to fail locally as well as globally.

The following is a transcription of a speech given at the Pathways to Reconciliation and Global Human Rights Conference, Sarajevo, August, 2005, edited, revised and corrected by Benjamin Barber, January 2006.

Introduction by Professor Micheline Ishay

For those of you who were not here on Tuesday evening, I will briefly introduce Professor Benjamin Barber. He is the Gershon and Carol Kekst Professor of Civil Society, and Distinguished University Professor at University of Maryland. He is also head of the Democracy Collaborative, which has offices in New York and Maryland. He is an internationally renowned political theorist, consulted regularly by civic and political leaders in the United States and Europe. He is the author of a very, very long list of books. I won't read all the titles, but just cite his *Strong Democracy*, the international bestseller *Jihad Versus McWorld*, and the recent *Fear's Empire*. His newest book, to be published next year, is *Consumed: The Fate of Citizens Under Capitalism in Decline*. He has been knighted by the French government and won the Berlin Prize of the American Academy of Berlin. Please welcome Benjamin Barber.

Professor Barber Commences:

Thank you very much Professor Ishay. I am also very happy to share the platform with Governor Howard Dean, although I must say that in a way I wish Governor Dean wasn't here in Sarajevo but that *President* Dean was in Washington. Perhaps our job here in Sarajevo would be easier if that were so. Certainly the current occupant of the White House makes our job here more difficult than it needs to be.

I want to make a few comments about democracy and diversity. Many people, including even President Bush, have argued that democracy and democratizing both individual nations and the world is the key to justice, peace and stability; the key to establishing diversity, and even to promoting reconciliation—although there are some questions we will want to ask about that. What I would like to do in this paper is to pose some possible provisional answers to some of the questions that can be asked about democracy: first, by asking what democracy might mean in today's world, not just for Americans, but also for people living in other troubled parts of the globe; and then by questioning the relationship between democracy and diversity, the theme of this conference and the core issue in this part of the world (Sarajevo).

Let me start by suggesting generally not what democracy is, but what democracy is not. To begin with, we need to recognize that democracy is not and should not be a singular noun. It is plural. In speaking about democracy one should refer to democracies—with an 's'. If one looks at the history of the world—look at political philosophy, look at political experience—it is apparent that democracy is heterogeneous, that it takes different forms in different times and places. There are many paths to liberty and hence many kinds of democracy, certainly no right definition of or single formula for democracy.

If there are many roads to democracy, it is unlikely—and this is the second feature of democracy worth noting—it is unlikely that democracy is identical with Americanization (as some people in Washington seem to think). To become democratic does not necessitate becoming like America. Democracy has an indigenous history in each part of the world, and has appeared in unlikely forms beyond the West. In Africa, roots of democracy can be found in fraternal tribes; in old Russia in the village *mir* and then in the workers' council (the *soviet*, prior to its takeover by the Bolsheviks); in Afghanistan in the *loya yirga* (grand tribal council). Nor is democracy even particularly modern. It was invented in the ancient Mediterranean world (Athens and Rome), and found expression in Europe's Renaissance cities, in England under the Magna Carta, in Switzerland in the Helvetic Confederation, and of course in colonial America in the New England township.

Third, and a consequence of the first two points, democracy is not something that can be realized from the outside in. Where it has been successful, democracy has grown from the inside out. It is a way that people find to liberate themselves within their society; a way to achieve self-government, relying on their own culture and history. This is, in a certain sense, simply an entailment of the fact that nations cannot be democratized from the outside.

Neither can they be democratized by military force. Perhaps the greatest mistake made by President Bush, first in Afghanistan and then repeated in Iraq, was the assumption that democracy can be imposed by external military force. It has never happened that way anywhere. With external military force you can defeat tyranny, but you cannot create democracy. In fact, the history of the world shows that whenever you defeat tyranny by force, the immediate consequence is not democracy but anarchy, disorder, instability, and very often, in time, civil war and renewed tyranny. That is the permanent risk of democracy by invasion.

In Iraq today we certainly witness the successful overthrow of a dictator. The United States dispatched a cruel and despicable tyrant, but it did not establish and has not established democracy, it has created chaos, though hardly by intention. From chaos grows insurgency, civil war, ethnic hatred – a set of problems that are likely to precipitate new forms of tyranny, perhaps in this case the majoritarian tyranny of a Shi'ite regime. Or the disintegration of the country into Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish regions. That is no way to democratize an unsettled nation emerging from cruel tyranny.

If democracy is plural and something other than Americanization, if it can't be imposed from the outside but must come from the inside, it is also to be distinguished from privatization or marketization – this is the fourth point I want to make. When Paul Bremer, the first American suzerain in Iraq, took his post, one of the first things he did was to suggest that if the Iraqi economy could be privatized, democracy would be more or less realized. But privatization of an economy is one thing and democratization is another. One can argue about privatization, whether it is good for productivity and the economy, but it is not identical with democracy.

There are a number of nations in which capitalism has had real success, but not all of them are democratic. The most productive capitalist economy in the world today is shining brightly in the darkest totalitarian state in the world. China has an unprecedented rate of growth, and an unprecedented tyrannical one-party state. If marketization means democracy, then what is going on in Beijing is inexplicable. Much the same can be said of former junta states in Latin America, such as Panama and Chile, which have had flourishing market economies and dismally oppressive governments.

There is, to be sure, a relationship between capitalism and democracy. It can be argued, but I myself believe that, historically, democracy comes first and creates the conditions for capitalism, and not the other way around. If, in fact, you look at the history of the West – England and France democratized and capitalism followed. There may be a synergy between democracy and capitalism, but the latter cannot be a surrogate for or guarantee of the former.

The next crucial point about democratization in transitional countries is that democracy tends to grow from the bottom up and not from the top down. It often seems that free governments grow top down: write a constitution, hold an election, create a political party, establish an independent judiciary or a bicameral legislature or a free press and – bingo! – democracy. But constitutions *crowd* democratic development, they do not initiate it. If you look at the history of the United States, there was at least one hundred years of experience of quasi-

autonomy and self-government in local towns, in colonial commonwealths like Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, in colonial institutions in the south, well before 1776. The constitution of 1789 ratified principles of self-government that American colonists had been experimenting with for a hundred years. To stand, a constitution requires a foundation built on democratizing experience. The most successful new democracies in Eastern Europe, such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, had considerable experience with civil society and engaged citizenship in earlier moments in their histories.

A constitution is like a building. Its foundation is comprised of civic institutions, civil associations and competent citizens. A constitution without citizens is mere parchment—a piece of paper of little significance. James Madison suggested a bill of rights in the absence of responsible citizens was a ‘paper parapet’ from which no defence of liberty was possible.

The security of rights depends on the responsibilities of citizens, and citizens are made, not born; educated rather than natural. Men and women may be born free but they are not born citizens. It is worth remembering that Rwanda was a signatory to the Genocide Convention. Nonetheless, in the absence of citizens, it was the scene of a horrendous genocide. The United States has signed onto the Geneva conventions, and yet Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib Prison and domestic spying have all been realities belying what is on paper. It is not enough to sign a treaty. The most compelling declaration of human rights I have ever read is the one published by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Every right that one might imagine and then some were ‘guaranteed’. But in the absence of citizens, without civic responsibility and political participation, there was no democracy, and all those enumerated rights were meaningless. So many words on paper. Distrust paper and the words written on it unless they are secured by a civic infrastructure, by civil society and by real citizenship.

The work of this conference, the work being done in Sarajevo by civil society associations and civic organizations, is likely to be more important in the long run than the work that first brought peace here: the Dayton accords and the United Nations presence—crucial as these were to ending the costly civic strife. But top-down activity by international civil servants or local politicians playing with words in a written-document constitution cannot take the place of the hard work of citizens. I suspect real peace and comity will not come to this part of the world until ordinary citizens reconcile: until tolerance comes to the hearts of ordinary women and men and becomes more than a formula of good-willed observers, no permanent reconciliation is likely to come.

For all of these reasons, Governor Dean is right on target when he insists that democracy is a slow process. No question, democracy takes time; takes patience. The English got started in 1215 with the Magna Carta, and 800 years later they just killed an innocent man in the underground because of their fear of terrorism. The Swiss started in 1291 with their first federal constitution, and it took almost 700 years—until 1961—for them to actually give women the vote. They have yet to join Europe. In the United States, we have been at it since 1776, yet our first eighty years unfolded in the shadow of slavery and we still haven’t got it quite right. The French had a revolution in 1789, and the Mexicans in 1810—both

are still looking to secure democracy fully. Russia emancipated the serfs in the middle of the nineteenth century, had a revolution in 1904 and again in 1917 and yet again in 1989, but Russia has yet to achieve real democracy. It's a long, slow, difficult process. Yet in Iraq, the pessimists say, 'It's going to take at least two years', and the optimists say, 'No, no, six months will be enough!' And here too, people await quick and immediate results. Year by year, we grow ever more impatient. But democracy and liberty take time, and in the absence of patience and tolerance they are not likely to happen at all. So while we are all impatient for the rewards of democracy, the work of democracy is slow and hard, and only patience is likely to succeed.

The achievements in this war-destroyed city and country have been remarkable given the short ten years that have passed. I know it seems like a lifetime for young people, but it's been a short time. For the first eighty years of our great republic in the United States, we not only had slavery, but women and even (in some states) white males without property were barred from the franchise. It has taken 200 years to come fully to terms with the consequences of slavery – which as Governor Dean said, we still face day to day in our politics.

I certainly do not mean this to be a 'brief' that says: 'Oh take your time. Don't worry. You've got plenty of it'. It's a brief saying: 'Work hard but work patiently, be persistent but be tolerant, give the process its time'. Ten years is but a moment in democracy's clock. The hands must keep moving, but they move slowly. No democracy has ever been built in a day or in a decade. Mistakes will be made.

Yet if it is anything, democracy is about the right of people to make their own mistakes. We may even wish to define democracy as the right to make our own mistakes – we know that tyrants and dictators make enough of their own. It is not a perfect system; it's been said it's the worst system in the world, except for all the other systems. Yet paternalistic outsiders also make mistakes. Rather than suffer the consequences of other people's mistakes, a democracy is marked by autonomy of error: the right not to be subjected to errors of others. An 'other' may be a surrogate, a paternalist, a substitute ruler in acting in your place under the illusion that his mistakes are less costly than yours.

With these crucial observations about the nature of democracy on the table, I want to address the issue that, until now, has not been confronted, the issue that defines the heart of our conference here in Sarajevo: the problem of diversity. I want to use the second part of my presentation to address more specifically the issues of democracy's relationship to diversity, above all – as the history of this part of the world shows – because they present a special challenge to democracy.

Some might argue, paradoxically, that time proves that the most effective political system for dealing with diversity is tyranny; the more dictatorial and controlling, the better. The history of empires, the history of totalitarian dictatorships, whether they were Nazi or communist, has achieved one form of success – it solved the problem of diversity. Repression is a temporary solution to the problem of pluralism and difference. It puts a lid on difference and enforces a kind of reluctant tolerance. You may or may not like the history of Titoism, but under Marshall Tito Yugoslavian ethnic nationality and the old resentments

were kept under control. Much the same was true under the Ottoman Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Freedom, liberation, and democracy have a way of unleashing the pathological sides of diversity in ways that dictatorship prevents. It is perhaps the cost—a very high price—that we pay for our liberty, our pluralism and the differences that divide us. The notion that democracy treats diversity effectively because it embraces liberty and tolerance is contradicted at every turn. Under democracy, the openness to difference can generate tensions and, in time, instability, hostility, and even bigotry. Civil war is a permanent peril, as Americans can attest.

Governor Howard Dean has said that we often respond to our fears—respond to difference by ennobling hatred. I would add that by enthroning the things that keep us apart in open recognition of diversity, we often end up building walls, choosing to live only with people who are just like us and ignoring—or oppressing or enslaving—those who are different.

There is reason for the discomfort democracy shows for diversity. It was designed for and born in a context of monoculturalism, intended for a homogenous people with a single language, a single religion, a single history, and a single set of mores. That was the nature of ancient Athens: a democracy for twenty thousand racially pure, mono-cultural Athenians. Anyone who wasn't Athenian, however noble their foreign birth, was not a citizen. Resident foreigners did not qualify. The idea of a multicultural Athens would have seemed outrageous, idiosyncratic, literally an idiocy to the ancients. To be an Athenian meant to worship Athenian gods, to speak Greek, and to share a common Greek heritage. That same experience was shared by the peoples of Renaissance Venice, Florence and Amsterdam, and in the city states of Europe, and in the New England towns. When Rome grew large and became a multicultural realm, it lost its simplicity and its republic became an empire.

In time, the first nation states of Europe in England and France defined themselves by a common language, history and religion. Diversity was a sign of national breakdown, not national pride. The purpose of monoculture was to embody a common will, to allow people to find common ground, to overcome whatever economic differences might divide it, and to create a single will. Rousseau's 'General Will' could only unfold in a people who already shared enough—a common civil religion and common mores—to be able to forge a common will. This was possible only in small, integral, relatively coherent states.

The problem of modern mass democracy is, of course, that like it or not, it must contend with diverse, pluralistic, disintegral societies where people have little in common. In multicultural and multinational societies like Canada, the USA, the Soviet Union and, of course, here in what was once Yugoslavia, the problem exists with a vengeance. Democracy suddenly finds itself facing a new social reality defined by difference and inflected by diversity, divided by pluralism. Quite suddenly, all the old democratic formulas are rendered problematic.

So it is not the case that somehow people here in Bosnia-Herzegovina could not get democracy right and fell into a costly and tragic genocidal war. Democracy everywhere has a difficult time with diversity. Difference in American meant

slavery. One solution, one might say, to the problem of diversity. Make the alien 'other' a slave. Genocide is a pathological response to diversity, but democracy is not necessarily a bar to genocide. The tyranny of the majority can express itself as a genocide against the minority. Or vice versa. Annihilation as a response to difference.

Yet this is hardly democracy's ideal or preferred solution to the challenge of diversity. Becoming democratic will not in itself solve the problems of difference, and majoritarianism is one reason why. Philosophers from Tocqueville to J. S. Mill have warned about the perils of majoritarian tyranny and suggested that it cannot be a sufficient definition of liberal democracy. But majoritarian tyranny is a special problem only in multicultural nations. In a monocultural state – one nationality, one religion – when the majority wins, it means only that part of a people disagrees with another, but next time individuals will find themselves another side. Interests change and majorities under these circumstances are mutable, changing over time and leaving no one group in a position of permanent exclusion. In democratic theory, one speaks of 'transient majorities' and minorities in which individuals have no permanent stake. Today's majority is tomorrow's minority. We respect one another because we are all alike. We share most things, but we disagree on specific interests or questions – who should represent us, the content of a statute, the distribution of goods in a sparse economy. But such mutable majorities and minorities present little difficulty to democracy. So it is not really majoritarian tyranny that is the problem in a monocultural and mononational state.

Take majoritarianism as a system and place it in a multinational, multicultural state: problems emerge. Because assuming, as is often the case, there is one ethnicity, one religion, one race in the majority, then a majority is more than a passing set of transient economic interests arraigned in shifting coalitions. It is, rather, a permanent embodiment of a race or an ethnicity that looks to the minority like it may remain entrenched forever – an immutable 'other' that can never be challenged or changed, and that can act in democracy's name to abuse or even annihilate minorities it disdains. It is usually the majority harassing the minority, but minorities can act aggressively in the putative name of self-defense by pre-emptively trying to tyrannize or even kill the hated majority. This is what the Sunnis seemed to be doing under Saddam Hussein, who managed to more or less enslave the Shi'ite majority. It was the story originally of the Tutsis against the Hutus in Rwanda, where the Hutus eventually took their own majority genocidal revenge. Either way, the democratic majority is not only not an obstacle to tyranny, but can actually become its instrument.

We know that the Dayton Accords, which brought an end to the violence here, gave a veto to local communities in certain key matters. Why? Because the peacemakers at Dayton feared the majoritarian principle. Same thing applies at the United Nations Security Council. And the challenge of Iraq today is to prevent the Shi'ites from dominating the minority Sunnis and Kurds and Assyrians, even though they were themselves the victims of a minority (Sunni) regime just a few years ago. If Shi'ite domination emerges, it will be in the name of democracy, but will in truth be majoritarian tyranny – quite another matter.

Aside from the ongoing challenge of majoritarianism, there is something problematic about multiculturalism itself. The term is used as if it has an uncomplicated and straightforward meaning. Yet the term 'multi-culturalism' is an oxymoron. Culture is, by definition, mono-, something homogenous. In the setting of identity politics, a multicultural identity is perplexing. Monocultural identity is perfectly clear: I'm a Bosniak, Muslim Bosniak, I know exactly who I am. People died and killed because of such clarity. In multicultural America it is more puzzling. It was easy when to be an American generally meant being a white, English, Protestant male — a WASP. That made sense. But to be an American today, maybe I'm a Catholic, an African-American, whose mother was from Scotland, and whose grandfather was from Russia, perhaps from Jewish great-grandparents. That kind of identity is confusing. If someone says, 'Who are you? What's your background?' offering an ethnic list that encompasses a continent is not very helpful, even if it's truthful. To say 'I'm Bosnian, I'm French, I'm Japanese' is to speak clearly. But a genealogy that embraces diversity is a calling-card for confusion, even for (especially for) the person to whom it belongs.

The prudent multicultural person may speak of being a cosmopolitan to evade the hard issues, but cosmopolitanism is a point of view, an aspiration perhaps, but not an identity around which communities can form or hatred (or love) can be generated. It is not what sociologists would call a 'thick' identity, or an 'ascriptive' identity (one given to us by birth and background rather than a 'voluntary' one we choose). We know what it means to be a Muslim or Serbian or Frenchman or Jew. To be a Catholic is to differentiate oneself from a Protestant. To be a Serb is not be a Bosniak (and we know all too well how clear this can be!) But figuring out who I am if I cannot appeal to a singular ascriptive identity based on where I was born, the language I speak, the religion I was born into. Such homogenous identities are easy to live with, and they feel good, but they tend to be exclusive, and tend to define themselves against the identity of others — of 'the other'. It was ascriptive understandings of identity that led to the terrible warfare in this part of the world, where people didn't have to know anything about each other, aside from their last names and the religion identity associated with them — which was enough to kill them. Identity, which is so rich and productive as a concept, and gives us our sense of place in the world, our sense of fraternity among others like us, our sense of neighborhood — so many of the things we love — is also what gives us reason to hate, reason to exclude, and reason to kill.

What this suggests to me is that identity is dialectic in character: it has potent virtues but it also has perilous vices. The virtues and the vices are unfortunately tied to one another, so that what makes a monocultural identity attractive also makes it dangerous and what makes a multicultural identity safe makes it perplexing. We would like to say: 'Let's get rid of all the bad parts of multicultural identity, and retain only the good ones, the ones that make us feel good and make us feel like neighbours. The trouble is that what makes us feel like neighbours makes others feel like strangers. And then neighbours gang up against strangers, or strangers come and try and kill the neighbours, and a

multicultural society consisting of monocultural elements finds itself engaged in civil war or genocide.

If majoritarianism can intensify the problem, there is another feature of democracy that can contain it. At its best, democracy tries to forge a new form of identity and with it a new identity politics: civic identity—the identity conferred by citizenship. On the one hand, the citizen possesses a thinner, less sustaining identity than a Catholic or Muslim, or Japanese or a Turk. It's not quite so rewarding to the heart, it's not as rich in its human and kinship relations. Yet it offers us an effective, even a sustaining identity. And the strength of civic identity is that it does not exclude others. On the contrary, it is defined by inclusion—participation in a common civic association and common membership with others. Citizenship knows only the boundaries it sets for itself, and can be as encompassing as imagination. You can be a citizen of a neighborhood, you can be a citizen of a region, you can be a citizen of a state, you can be a citizen of Europe, and you can even be a citizen of the world. Civic identity is expansive. It depends on certain fundamental faculties that have a powerful role in opening us to the world.

The crucial faculty in civic identity is imagination. The citizen is necessarily a person of imagination, capable of seeing beyond themselves, of understanding the interests and feelings of others. People defined by ethnic and racial identity need little in the way of imagination. They see the world in terms of colour, in terms of religion, in terms of language, in terms of common history and common values. And when they see someone who is different by one of these measures, they cannot really imagine that it is someone like them. When you cannot imagine another human to be a creature like yourself, it is much easier to kill them. We human beings pay one another a backhanded kind of compliment: we find it very hard to kill members of our own species, other human beings like us. But we manage to do it of course—by dehumanizing those we need to kill, by treating them as something other than human beings like us.

So if the 'other' in question—say he is a Bosniak—is not 'really' a human being, not like us, but some sort of inferior creature, how much easier it is to hurt or enslave or destroy him. But how to kill other citizens? For with citizens, we imagine them to possess common beliefs and civic values that make them like us, and we have imagination to see them as members of a common *civitas*. In this sense, citizenship is an imaginative identity in which we see in other human beings who speak different languages and have different backgrounds, creatures who have needs like us, feelings like us, and who in a certain sense *are* us. It is imagination that creates this strange abstraction, the human race, 'humanity'. It is a very difficult conception to actually imagine humanity when you think about it. It's very easy to imagine your Catholic neighbour, your Jewish neighbour, your Turkish neighbour. But to imagine humanity, what is that? It takes imagination.

One way to cast the 'other' as something other than human is to find words, slurs, which put them in the class of animals, beasts, the less than human. American troops in Vietnam used words like 'gooks' and 'slopes', and terrible slurs like 'nigger' continue to defile our speech. Yet in a certain sense it is a kind

of tribute to our backwards decency, because what we are really saying when we scream ‘gook’ is that we cannot kill this enemy soldier until we read him out of the human race. We can kill ‘gooks’ and ‘slopes’ and ‘niggers’ but find it far more difficult to murder the common human being our imagination tells us lurks behind the hated enemy face.

It is by lack of imagination that we identify and slaughter enemies. What is a bigot but a man without imagination? What is genocide but an act of ignorant imbecility by those who refuse to engage imagination? I believe that one real objective of democratic politics, of education, and particularly of arts education is the cultivation of imagination. The arts play a special role in evoking and arousing imagination. (Susan Sondheim was meant to be here today, and she was someone who spent her lifetime thinking about what it means to evoke imagination as a way of reaching across boundaries and making brothers and sisters of people who might otherwise despise one another.) For this reason, arts education and its role in the evocation of imagination is absolutely crucial to the functioning of democracy in diverse multinational societies. This is perhaps why the Sarajevo Film Festival, the successor event to ours this week, is an appropriate follow-on. For the Film Festival reminds us of our creative and imaginative past. As long as you watch one another’s films, perhaps you are not thinking about what it means to be Bosniak or Croat or Serb or Montenegrin. There is only the one world of art. There are then ways in which as ‘small-d’ democrats we can begin to think about what it means to deal with diversity – as long as we understand that it is our citizenship rather than our genealogy that is likely to set us free from suspicion and hatred.

Finally, let me close by insisting that democracy in a multicultural, multinational world has to be understood in a context of interdependence. Interdependence means that, like it or not, we now can no longer create the kinds of small separate communities in which we lived in the ancient and early modern world. It’s not just that Bosnia and Herzegovina can’t do it without reference to Europe and the rest of the world. It’s that everyone else everywhere in the world is now dependent on others – even in a hegemonic, powerful country like the United States. Sovereignty is an archaic notion, if it is limited to nations. The United States takes a strong sovereigntist line on its foreign policy; the problem is not that it is illegal or immoral, however, but that it is ineffective – it fails to acknowledge or deal effectively with our reality. There is little that the United States can do by itself. Unilateralism is finally just stupid because it fails to deal with the challenges we face together: AIDS, weapons proliferation, global capital, global warming, global crime, terrorism. In an interdependent world, common problems can only be overcome by common solutions and common coalitions of forces. So democracy and diversity now are the reality, not just here, but everywhere in the world.

If the primary challenges facing us are challenges across borders and among nations, then the problems of democracy are not merely problems for specific nations – for Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Sarajevo, and what was Yugoslavia – or for Europe – small and large – but for peoples across borders. Democracy is not just to regulate nations but to regulate what happens among nations. With interdependence and globalization as our realities, if we do not either

democratize globalization, or globalize democracy, democracy is likely to fail within nations—fail locally as well as globally. What happens within a small nation in a world of interdependence can affect what happens in a large nation. If Sarajevo does not make it as a multicultural democracy, then the United States is likely to face problems as a multicultural democracy. If children go to bed insecure and fearful in Damascus or Palestine, children in New York and London are likely to live in fear and insecurity. We can no longer look from the distance and say, 'that's your problem, not mine'. Once upon a time it was possible to say 'there is a fire in the basement, but I live on the third floor, so I don't have a problem'. Today the whole building burns. Adrift on a single planetary ship means damage in steerage ultimately drowns the folks in first class. We make it together, or not at all.

It is a challenge, but also a source of hope, that democracy today is something that will be achieved together or not at all; will succeed in time here in Sarajevo or may fail in Europe and around the world. All live free or none will live free. Our fate is now a common fate. That is a momentous, perhaps a frightening prospect. Let us hope that it may spur us to find ways to live rather than to die together.