[Democracy by the Global South](https://nation.com.pk/14-Feb-2019/democracy-by-the-global-south" \t "_new)

Atle Hetland February 14, 2019 the nation

In his idea-stuffed distinguished guest-lecture at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Islamabad, the French political scientist and international relations researcher, Professor Emeritus Bertrand Badie, gave a broad overview of the West’s, or should we say the North’s, multilateral world leadership – and failure. There is no level global playing field in the United Nations which today has 193 members; it remains as it was when there were 51 founding members in 1945. The post-decolonisation process was built on naive and simplistic thinking, more so than a deliberate plan to keep the young states as ‘apprentices of democracy’ on the local and international stage. I think he should have said it was deliberate by the West/North; whether it was right or wrong, can be debated. By this time, there should have been changes.

Professor Badie used the newer, more friendly term of ‘Global South’, which I for short will mostly simply call the ‘South’, a synonym for what we still term the ‘developing countries’, and earlier often, the ‘Third World countries’. Badie suggested that the Global South would (maybe should) become the leaders of the multilateral world. He did not quite discuss if this would just be a geographic shift, with ‘headquarters’ in the South, or an all-inclusive and truly democratic new era.

In any case, it is too early to say because the Global South has long to go, I believe, before it will take the baton of dominance and world leadership, yes, if indeed it will happen, if the West will allow it to happen. Or, maybe it will only happen with the leaders of the West together with the leaders of the South? That would follow the ‘laws’ of imperialism and the theory and thinking of Professor Emeritus Johan Galtung, the founder of the discipline of peace research. Already, the political, social and economic leaders of the North are partners with the same in the South, especially so in the economic field, which has become global in itself, on the terms of the strong and powerful; we know, money has no borders, yet, most owners are fully or party in the North. The social culture of the upper-class is also very much Western, but we may call it international. The political cultures and understanding of democracy are Western. The South is still struggling to define its own politics, its own ideologies and alternative ways of progressing. It doesn’t want to copy the West, yet, none has found better ways and new ideologies and values of how people should live together and share the struggle and reap the fruits – except for China, maybe, whose economic development has been, and continues to be impressive, hence, with major social achievements, too.

The problem is its lack of achievements and alternatives in politics and democracy, as China is still is a one-party, communist state. It doesn’t seem to want to export its political model, maybe not even its development model, although many are both puzzled and impressed by how it could get more that 1.3 billion people behind its economic and social development without much opposition. There is homework to do for China if we shall ever see multilateral and international leadership from the Global South. We cannot imagine that without China and without Chine in the driver’s seat, too.

Or, is it too sweeping and broad to talk about the South, with three-quarters of the people of the world as a ‘unit’? Let me again refer to my countryman Johan Galtung, who has argued that we should expect the emergence of regional powers (think he suggested eight or ten) from today’s Western dominated world; USSR is no longer the ‘pole’ it was, but USA is still on the scene (with the rest of the Americas), and the EU block is strong, with the close continent of Africa, too. In our region, Galtung has suggested that Central Asia also has the potential to become a regional power, perhaps with neighbours, certainly with Russia, but also with Iran and others, and perhaps those countries, with China too, and Pakistan, will indeed become a new ‘block’. I don’t know where India would be exactly, maybe the leader of its own ‘block’ in South Asia, or, maybe in loser cooperation with China? India’s economy will in a couple of decades be the second largest in the world, after China, and ahead of USA.

Last week, I wrote in my column in this paper about the history and future of democracy. I was pleased to get a number of email responses. I had thought I should continue to write about the ‘quality of democracy’ this week, which has generally declined in the last decade or so, indeed in USA, according to surveys carried out by the international Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) in Gothenburg and Lund, Sweden. I also thought I should write about some ‘sub-areas’ of democracy, taken up in my readers’ emails. But then Prof. Bertrand Badie came along, and his points were so important, I thought, that I had to write about them now and let other things come later. The Global South is gaining power and it asserts itself, and maybe it will turn into (democratic) global leadership, too – well, if we need a vertical rather than a horizontal world.

Towards the end of my article today, let me mention a few of Professor Badie’s other points. First, being a political scientist, he discussed the term ‘state’ (which he didn’t term ‘nation state’, but ‘imported state’), saying that it is a construct which is just some hundred years old, bringing together the entities that feudal lords ruled. He said that the state unit is without any standards and moral, except for wanting to reproduce and strengthen itself. He did not stress that, but it is a fact that the state’s power is diminishing in our time, and that states cluster in groups, giving up its sovereignty, for example in formal ways, such as in the European Union, or in other ways, such as in the cooperation of the Nordic countries.

Professor Badie stressed several fields where the nation states, and the multilateral system of today have not worked well, indeed in post-decolonisation, as mentioned above, and globalisation and migration. In these fields, he said that there was massive failure. Towards the end of his talk, and after reference to some of the (more socialist) classics in the social sciences of my age, Badie claimed that he was still optimistic about the future of the world; he believed in ‘international solidarity’ – not in international politics and cooperation, not in economics, not quite in humanitarian assistance either, and not in other cooperation within the existing institutions and organisations. Yet, he still believed in UN agencies such as UNDP (for aid) and UNCTAD (for trade), but he did not go into any details. He didn’t compare UN to China’s economic assistance and interconnectivity in Asia, through CPEC and BRI in Pakistan and beyond, and certainly also in Africa.

I don’t think it quite followed from what he otherwise said, but Badie underlining international solidarity, starting from solidarity with the less fortunate nationally and regionally, was a hopeful vision. In the past it was the rich (in the West) who claimed they wanted to support poor in the new world, through aid and trickle-down of capitalism, but globalisation didn’t work.

Professor Badie said that in future it will not be the poor who are in the pocket of the rich; it is already the other way around: it is the poor who have power and the rich had better realise that soon.

If he is right, I am not sure, and it does need a lot of organising from the poor to make Badie’s words into reality. It is the same with the Global South getting into power, getting to renew and reinvent democracy and development – and to include the powerful in the West and North, to help them, too, to reinvent their political thinking and make them contribute better than they have done in past decades. Without them, I am sceptical, but with them, I have hope for the Global South will develop faster – not only with China as the only ‘pole’, but with several poles; yet in Asia, China is the most important power, and it is only a matter of time before it develops new, more democratic institutions. Since it could manage to realise a ‘development miracle’, it can also do miracles in other fields. So, then, the Global South will be on the scene, or is rather the ‘Global West cum Asia’?

Professor Bertrand Badie mentioned that he has just written a new book about international solidarity and the future of multilateral cooperation, ‘Quand le Sud reinvente le monde’ (2018, in French). I am sure some of the connections and interconnections that he couldn’t explain in detail in the lecture are indeed in the book. But then, in the end, the French intellectual tradition is not only to explain and tell everything, it is to explore and question and to get us all to think – and humour is allowed, indeed for the super-intellectuals, too, even if they sometimes may seem to going over the top. It may be just for fun, but also to underline points and possibilities for you and I to help reinvent the world, nothing less.

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