Biodemocracy and the Earth Charter

with Matthew T. Riley, "The Earth Charter and Biodemocracy in the Twenty-First Century"; Mary Evelyn Tucker, "The Earth Charter and Journey of the Universe*: An Integrated Framework for Biodemocracy"; Heather Eaton, "Global Visions and Common Ground: Biodemocracy, Postmodern Pressures, and the Earth Charter", and Matthew T. Riley, "The Democratic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis: Lynn White, Biodemocracy, and the Earth Charter."*

GLOBAL VISIONS AND COMMON GROUND: BIODEMOCRACY, POSTMODERN PRESSURES, AND THE EARTH CHARTER

by Heather Eaton

Abstract. The theme of this article is a rise in notions of a planetary community, and the tensions this evokes in global-local and universal-contextual debates. The primary focus is the realization that new visions are needed to respond to ecological dilemmas in a culturally diverse yet global world and interconnected Earth. Of the many ways to discuss this, I first consider the growing interest in and expansion of biodemocracy as a way to combine these dimensions. Insights and issues from postmodern perspectives follow this, surveying the suspicion of what lurks behind "global." The next segment turns to ecological postmodernists who realize that a unifying path must be found for a viable planetary future. A brief and final section considers the Earth Charter to be an initiative responsive to postmodern pressures, and yet seeking a global vision and common ground for an emerging world community.

Keywords: biodemocracy; the Earth Charter; ecological postmodernism; environment; global values; planetary civilization

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Biodemocracy

Biodemocracy is an appealing expression. The ancestry of the term is obscure. Some trace its origins to Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855). Throughout that book Whitman develops the principles of nature and "natural," connecting them to health, freedom, the human body, sensuous awareness, the biosphere, and the need for political democracy. For

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Whitman, these could transform a nation into a biodemocracy (Burbick 1994, 113).

Others associate biodemocracy with deep ecologist Arne Naess and his notion of biospheric egalitarianism: all life shares an equal right to live and thrive, in principle. For Naess, this is an intuitively obvious axiom, or biodemocratic principle, to secure the future of the ecosphere as a whole (Naess 1973, 95–100).

Since the 1970s, the common usage of biodemocracy is as an eco-political stance. It stands with land sovereignty, organic farming, fair trade, and food security, and against genetically modified organisms (GMOs), monoculture and factory farming, and corporate control of food production. There is a great deal of discussion and activism using the term biodemocracy in this manner (Cummins 2006, 2013).

In the past decade or so, biodemocracy has become a broad spectrum. For example, biodemocracy can mean the democratic control of specific biological resources. In this view, the natural world is a resource belonging to communities who live in that bioregion (Escobar 1999). Or it could be an overarching ecological ethic: biodemocracy is the right of all life to live and, anthropocentric concerns lose absolute priority, similar to Naesse's notion of biospheric egalitarianism. The meanings are expanding, oftentimes including ecological and social ethics, and/or worldview. Two examples will illustrate the point.

Formed in 2002, the South Asian Dialogues on Ecological Democracy (SADED) is a global network of individuals and organizations working on issues of ecological sustainability, equitable development, democratic control of natural resources, and justice. SADED includes a website of resources, networks, articles and events that "prepares strategies and thematic, theoretical, administrative, and practical models on ecological democracy." They seek a comprehensive democracy of life, where ecological concerns and democracy empower each other to include all dimensions of life. They are an intersection point for citizen's movements and local/global dialogues, using platforms such as the Indian Social Forum, Asian Social Forum, Euro-Asian forums, Afro-Asian dialogues, and the World Social Forum. SADED addresses food insecurities, climate change, development, and sustainability, with scathing critiques of global economic and political patterns of inequities. They also established an ecological democratic vision in their Charter of Human Responsibilities, which has been translated into over twenty-five languages. Overall, SADED's objectives are to "identify ways of articulation of ecological democracy in a manner that it can capture the imagination as a desirable worldview of all sections in India, South Asia and globally [sic]" (SADED. http://www.saded.in/)

Their approach to biodemocracy is inclusive of both local and global culture, with political and ecological dimensions. SADED illustrates one avenue for biodemocracy that seeks a path forward for a differentiated yet

global human community living within a larger ecological community of life.

From another angle, ideas associated with the realm of global bioethics are leading some to propose that a global bioethics must become a global biodemocracy. For Sirku Hellsten, in "Global Bioethics: Utopia or Reality?," the expansion from medical to global bioethics requires greater analysis of contextual specificities, cultural prejudices, global dynamics, and power relations between developed and developing countries (2008, 70–81). This has led the discussion on "global bioethics" to deal with global distributive justice as well as the germane topic here of the cultural relativism/universalism debates. A central goal of global bioethics, for Hellsten, should therefore be the exposing of global biopolitics and biopiracy, and the situating of bioethics in a global biodemocracy.

Theoretical aspects of global bioethics are immersed in postmodern deconstruction analyses, and the dismantling of concepts, categories and speech in the face of biopolitics and biopower practices and bioethical concerns. Yet, there is a turn to a global biodemocracy or biopolitical democracy (Schramm 2011, 1–15). It is pertinent to note that there is a move in the global bioethics discussions to consider a global aspect as either in addition to or superseding the local. While the Western tendency to interpret the "global" of global bioethics as universal—normative, not descriptive—the more recent approaches consider "global" to mean a unity encompassing myriad diversities.

These two examples reveal key themes of this essay. The first, from SADED, implies that the larger Earth reality must be included in our social imaginaries. It is pressing to take ecological ruin seriously, as well as to become ecologically literate. The further insight is to incorporate the growing awareness that we live within "a thin layer of culture over a vast expanse of nature" (Eaton 2013, 116). The second theme is the tricky maneuver between normative global ethics, patterns and practices of injustices and inequalities, and local sovereignty. Bioethicist Fermin Roland Schramm describes this as the mediation between biopolitics and biopower, that is, "the relationships established between *bios* and *zoé,* between them and the *polis* and between them and *techne*" (Schramm 2011, 12). For some, the heart of biodemocracy is *bios*, and for others it is the *polis*. A quick look at "democracy" will aid this discussion.

Democracy

Democracy is the audacious hope that the *demos*—all the people, the entire population—can at the same time be the *polis*—the community of active participating citizens. The debates within studies of democracy are infinitely nuanced, with notions of thick rather than thin democracy, weak or strong, liberal, social, procedural, frail, failed, and much more

(Landmann 2007). A selected assortment reveals specific contemporary tendencies, as well as breaches between the ideals and the practices of democracies.

In *The Life and Death of Democracy* (2009), John Keane claims that democracy is entering a new historical phase. The language, image, desire, and process of democracy are *becoming familiar* to most peoples, and some even consider it a right. It is possible in every urban context to speak of "global democracy." Democracy has become a universal value, suggests Amartya Sen (1999). Given this, Keane notes that theories and practice of democracy are mutating. Institutions are being stretched to accommodate, and representative forms of democracy are being supplemented (and complicated) by diverse democratic ideas and procedures.

In addition, democracy is becoming a pragmatic tool against concentrations of unaccountable power, as witnessed by the democratic intents of Occupy, Arab Spring, the Canadian Indigenous movement Idle No More, or Hong Kong's mounting reaction to Chinese rule. Keane also suggests this era is a *monitory democracy*: the public is monitoring the use of power through NGOs, civil assemblies and organizations, unions, charities, and judicial reviews. Elections are scrutinized and democracy is monitored by civil societies.

Many claim that the only protective shield from inequities and totalitarianism is democracy. Democracy dilutes power, resists the hardening of ideologies, and allows for conflict and dissent within mechanisms of negotiation (paraphrased from Sandilands 1999, 127). Globally, democratic practices are often tied to human rights, a concept with a political force of unprecedented scope. Movements based on "rights" have been successful in countless democratic circumstances, and in a few decades. People invoke their "rights" for justice, freedom, sovereignty, equality, dignity, environmental health, and all manners of causes. The influence of "rights" is expanding to include animals and the Rights of Mother Earth, as evident in the Cochabamba Declaration of 2010.

Democracy and human rights are nonetheless an uneasy alliance, complexified when justice or gender are added. Gains for women are difficult to attain and sustain, and gender justice is arduous, in spite of progress. There is considerable evidence that gender justice, equity, and functional democracies are linked, with a growing emphasis on women's participation in democratic governance. Still, the most frequent and pervasive human rights violations—everywhere—are the physical and sexual assaults of women. These are global, daily, and ubiquitous assaults. They are assessed as directly affecting half of the world's women, and indirectly effectively all, in spite of some countries, mainly democratic and socialist, embedding laws, judiciary processes, and cultural practices to discourage sexual and physical violence against women. The global trend for human rights overtly includes women, yet with varying effectiveness.

Human rights are divided into four categories: political, cultural, social, and economic rights. Louise Arbour (2006), former High Commissioner for Human Rights, suggests that human rights efforts are mostly about gaining or redressing political rights. However, the forces repressing women are enmeshed with their lack of cultural, social, and economic rights. Democracies often fail to uphold these "softer rights" where gender rights and justice are most needed. Women live in worlds of structural oppression and violence that can readily coexist with democracy. Thus, democracy is not a guarantor of human rights.

Democratic Deterioration

Democracy itself is under siege, according to Arran Gare, Australian post-modern eco-philosopher. He claims that democracy is a charade because important decisions are made privately, and by experts in the service of global corporations (Gare 2013, 331). This has been coming for some time. For example, the political power and intense campaigns of oil corporations means, as Canadian Ursula Franklin says, we are in a state of occupation by an army of marketeers, and governments are puppets in the hands of corporations[1] (Korten 1995).

"Acting in secret while maintaining a democratic facade, the corporations tend towards conspiracy, and those who suspect this and resist are viewed as paranoiac" (Hayles 1999, 167).

Governments are corporatocracies, bureaucracies of transnational corporations. Democracy is being "managed," effectively neutralized and replaced with what Sheldon Wolin (2003) famously called "inverted totalitarianism." The outcome has been a pervasive cynicism about democracy and a depoliticized, inert population. Increasing numbers of frail and failed states are the counterparts to the stabilizing of corporate empires. Governments congeal into economic agendas that benefit few. There is an erosion of democracies while camouflaged global forces manipulating local peoples and geographies.

It is fair to deduce that if governments are not the vehicles of democracy, then democracy is at great risk. Of course, there are counter-weights to these postindustrial political structures. Civic movements are gaining strength and prominence, and are reshaping democracy, often via the Internet. Universities and colleges are protectors of democracies, offering exchange, debates, and reasoned positions. These institutions may be some of the last holdouts for public discussion as a facet of democracy. And yet, curricula are being influenced, financed, or politicized by various agendas, and this is shaping, even reducing, the public intellectual horizon.

When we add ecological concerns, the view becomes hazier. Corporate interests determine many ecological decisions, at least presently in North America. What has not been sufficiently considered is that

disturbances in planetary systems are most difficult to address not only due to jurisdiction and national sovereignty, but also because political and ecosystem boundaries are unrelated. Thus fresh water, ocean life, pollution pathways, deforestation, species extinction, and any number of global ecological problems will be difficult to resolve in the global political mosaic and the corporatization of democracies.

Climate change is a global matter, and to some extent has been recognized. Yet with close to thirty years of international negotiation, very little has been accomplished. Many predict that without functional democracies, effective action against climate change will be impossible. Others say that democracies will disintegrate under the stress of ecological disasters and their social consequences. William Ruckelshaus, the first head of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, said, "long before the systems of the planet collapse, the institutions of democracy will buckle under the pressure of a series of ecological emergencies" (quoted from Gellspan 1999). Climate change involves food insecurities, droughts, floods, environmental refugees, and epidemics; it is predicted that governments will resort to martial law for social stability.

Democracy, Ecology, and Citizenship

There are extensive debates about democracy and citizenship, considering global ecological citizenship and ecological stewardship, or ecological, green, environmental, or sustainable citizenship (Melo-Escrihuela 2008, 114). This conceptual diversity reflects the complexity of the interplay among democracy, citizenship, and ecological problems. For example, what is the role of governments toward creating an ecologically responsible citizenry? How do they deal with the causes of ecological concerns? In general, if and when democratic governments intervene, it is most often with citizens not corporations. Melo-Escrihuela explains:

> Public campaigns encourage citizens to use more public transport and to drive fewer cars, but in most cases, industries that are also responsible for carbon dioxide emissions are not targeted. Rather than going to the roots of the problem, institutional campaigns appeal to citizens' ecological sensibility with messages related to health issues and welfare. . . . If industry is targeted, there might be consequences that undermine economic growth. In this respect, citizens are an easier and less dangerous target than corporations (2008, 124).

Many realize that extensive transformations of governing institutions are needed. Some advocate for a green state which would "create the conditions for green citizenship" (Barry 2006, 28), and for an "ecologically guided democracy" (Christoff 1996). There are lengthy discussions on how to construct a green state. Robyn Eckersley (2004) has examined how a green state could be an ecological democracy. However, it requires new

institutions and principles: new procedures, decision rules, and forms of representation and participation (Barry and Eckersley 2005).

Much more needs to be mentioned to understand contemporary democracies and their political and ecological challenges. The point is that while we can rise up for biodemocracies, there are potent, functioning, and global barriers that are unyielding. Furthermore, we cannot simply add "bio" to democracy, given the state of democracies and the natural world. Generally speaking, therefore, a facile understanding of biodemocracy does not yield much insight.

Biodemocracy: A New Vista

Biodemocracy is one of many images now used to signify that an enhanced vision of the ecopolis, or ecological/social imaginary is vital (Eaton 2013, 109–26). In addition to ecological democracy, other terms or images include Earth, green or inclusive democracy, global ecological citizenship, biospheric egalitarianism, ecological-cosmopolitanism, bio-political democracy, global bioethics and politics, global biodemocracy, ecological civilization, or an Ecozoic era. From a panoramic viewpoint, there is a singularity that is apparent.

The collective perception is that we live at the edge of an era, facing challenges of a type and magnitude not faced previously by human communities. There are multiple causes and uncertain solutions. Nation states are politically and ideologically ill-equipped to address ecological problems, because the latter are often interconnected, planetary, within global economic entanglements. From other realms of hermeneutic activities, there is a weariness and wariness of transcendental paradigms. Last, the myriad incompatible representations of the world are not coexisting well, and the conflicts from irresoluble worldviews are intense. It is not hyperbole to say that we face the end of civilization as we know it, and of the Cenozoic era. We need a new way forward.

Biodemocracy and its associates reveal that in spite of extensive and incisive deconstructive postmodern analyses, communities desire coherence. There is a growing desire for common ground, a collective scaffold, a vision, or shared principles upon which to build a viable future: a common future. From the Brundlant Report, the "World Charter for Nature" in 1982 to today, most ecological discussions endorse some form of coherent worldview for a sustainable future. And yet the challenge to offer one that is sufficiently comprehensive, nuanced, just, protective of diversities and yet with communal values, if not vision, is immense. One of the reasons for this is due to postmodern epistemological and cultural acumens, and warranted distrust of anything "global."

Postmodern Projects and Proposals

In general, the postmodern trajectory, as a historical project generating myriad analyses and cultural expressions, opposes hegemonies. Postmodernisms expose and refute political, cultural, bodily, intellectual, or other colonizations. The attentiveness to the contrivances of power has brought to light level upon level of cultural discontinuities, divisions, political disembodiments, and entanglements. In general terms, the postmodern project, as an epistemological crusade, avows radical pluralities and polydoxy, with a rejection of any meta, comprehensive, global, or universal narrative.

Early postmodern intellectual efforts exposed that cultural codifications and identity markers, previously assumed to be self-evident, natural, inherent, universal, and thus undisputed, were contrived and historically contingent. They laid bare the frailty and contingency of gender identities, nationality, ethnicity, and class privilege, unmasking how these are manipulated, legitimized, and sustained by precise cultural practices and principles, discourses, ideologies, and institutions. Issues of belonging, hybrid identities, social interconnections, and place-based processes were endorsed, alongside intellectual resistance to imperialist dimensions of globalization. There has been ample dissecting of "globalization." Waves of postmodern discussions followed, developing complex intellectual theories, diverse methodologies, analytic angles and emphases, and, addressing a wide range of topics typically affirming local and specific over global and general.

The exposure of radical diversities and entrenched power disparities also, arguably, led to a disengagement with the common good. The difficulty with communal values, ethics, and collective vision is a potential fallout between rigorous postmodern critiques. Many, such as Ulrich Beck, ask, "what are the unseen and unwanted consequences of the new rhetoric of 'global community', 'global governance' and 'cosmopolitan democracy'?" (1998, 29).

My interest lies in a softening occurring in some ecologically concerned postmodern quarters around the need for a "comprehensive orientation," for lack of a better trope. This interest in the "global" is allowing for an alliance among postmodernists and those seeking a global vision and common ground.

Ecological Postmodernisms

In 1995, Lawrence Buell published *The Environmental Imagination*, wherein he studied how American nature writing represents the natural world. The premise was that with the environmental crisis comes a crisis of the imagination. Buell delved into environmental perception, believing that scholarship can contribute to imagining a more ecocentric existence. This book launched discourses that have contributed greatly to ecological postmodern projects.

I am cutting snippets out of large swathes of particular postmodern, postcolonial, and ecocriticism conversations to stitch these together with biodemocracy and the Earth Charter. I am not assuming ideological convergence among these or with other postmodern discourses. From diverse postmodern factions, the following offer a useful sample of my emphasis: *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* (Arran Gare 1995); *Environmental Ethics for a Postcolonial World* (Deane Curtin 2005); *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Ursula Heise 2008); *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin 2010); *Postcolonial Green Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt 2010); *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (Elizabeth Deloughrey and George Handley 2011).

The collective insights from these works are superb. The savvy and precise analyses of both blatant and subtle imperialism, and of hegemonies and dominations related to ecological decline are truly excellent. There is an in-depth recognition of the environmental impacts of ideological, cultural, and economic colonialism exposing countless intersections between ecological exploitation and empire. Global capitalism and colonialism are entangled. Social, political, cultural, and ecological systems are intertwined. Environmental issues cannot be separate from questions of social justice and human rights. The conclusion of *Green Postcolonialism* is "no social justice without environmental justice; and without social justice – for all ecological beings – no justice at all" (Huggan and Tiffin 2007, 10).

Postmodern discourses, in general, offer a heightened awareness of the entanglement of resource destructive technology, the "forced march to industrialization" and the disastrous cultural and ecological effects (Guha 2000, 196). They make visible how the erosion of various social structures diminishes culture diversity and plurality. They explain how global hegemonies—ideological and economic—are rendering people powerless and undercutting local democracies, in a postcolonial version of ecological imperialism (Huggan 2008, 67).

As expected, among the range of ecological postmodern discourses, there are internal disagreements, tensions, or analytic and ideological incompatibilities. One of relevance here is about the continuity and discontinuity between humans and nature. In general, postmodernists are critical of whatever assumes homogeneity, or a seamless or fluid ontological or epistemological joining between humans, other animals and nature. Language that expresses any kind of singleness, wholeness or totality to or in nature is suspect. Expressions such as Earth community, whole Earth, Earth as home, the natural world, or some of the deep ecology tropes are met with critique. In spite of refuting hierarchical dualisms and other Cartesian dichotomies, any tendency toward assuming a comprehensive unity, or a facile similitude between humans and "nature"

is equally rebutted. Some claim that alternative expressions such as setting, place, circumstances, and the environment are also dualistic. Other terms are context, life-world, bioregion, or eco-social location, although it is still possible to consider these objectively and dualistically with a breach between humans and "nature" (Berleant 1992, 10).

There are postmodern intricacies in attempting to express the idea of the environment as a continuous unity of organism, perception, and place. This necessitates an image of nature as some form of coherence, yet without oneness. The dilemma seeping into these postmodern deliberations is that it is manifestly true, or "soberly realistic . . . to recognize that ultimately everything affects everything else, that humans along with all other things inhabit a single intraconnected realm" (Berleant 1992, 9). In "Deleuze and Deep Ecology," Welchman argues that Gilles Deleuze proposed a concept of nature that goes to unusual lengths to establish continuity between the cultural, biological, and even inorganic domains (2008, 122; Deleuze 1994, 35). In *Les trois ecologies* (1989), Félix Guattari asserted: "it is quite wrong to make a distinction between action on the psyche, the socius and the environment" (Trans 2000, 41). Later in the essay he wrote, "Now more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture; in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems, the mechanosphere and the social and individual Universes of reference, we must learn to think 'transversally'" (2000, 43).

Deleuze and Guattari meticulously investigated a conceptual apparatus that resists anthropocentrism, hierarchy, domination, and homogeneity, and was also commensurate with a deep metaphysical (not transcendent) naturalism and ecological literacy. In *A Thousand Plateaus* they explain why the main idea of book is not an argument, a dialectic or in linear form. They write: "Nature doesn't work that way: in nature, roots are taproots with a more multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one. Thought lags behind Nature" (2004, 5). Deleuze and Guattari offered the postmodern world the rhizome: an image or diagram of life and thought that is both scientifically sound as well as epistemologically postmodern. In modernity, forms of relatedness are mistakenly represented as a "tree of life." But the detectable dynamics and processes of relatedness are direct lateral connections between life forms, interconnection across heterogeneous domains, networking or process.

The significance of the imagery of a rhizome over a tree cannot be underestimated. Simply put, the "tree" in all its arborescent conceptions, classifications, and hierarchical guises dominates the Eurowestern intellectual, scientific, social, and cultural traditions. Binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree, Deleuze and Guattari claim. Rhizomes are collective assemblages, multiplicities, anarchic, and heterogeneous. They can be ruptured and will reform in unpredictable and multiple ways. The rhizome model has many epistemological implications, including for this

conundrum of continuity among humans, other animals, and the natural world. As Welchman aptly states: "The relative under-theorization of ecology in comparison with evolutionary biology is exactly the victory of tree over rhizome since ecology is the study of the systemic properties of the lateral connectivity (alliance) between leaf nodes in the evolutionary tree of descent (filiation)" (2008, 124). Rhizome denotes process and network. Guattari frequently emphasized this processual conception of society and subjectivity. In *Soft Subversions* (1996) he wrote: "(The) idea of process is fundamental. It assumes that one has discarded the idea that one must absolutely master an object or a subject—and that [. . .] analytical research is given a dimension of finitude, singularity, existential delimitation, precariousness in relation to time and values [. . .] There are neither ends nor means; only processes; processes auto-constructing life, auto-constructing the world, with mutant, unforeseen, unheard-of effects" (277).

Postmodern Insights and Issues

Most of the ecological postmodern discourses mentioned are discussing reimagining and reconfiguring the meanings of nature and humanity, and the place and role of humans "in nature." Throughout these explorations, decisive distinctions are the norm. For example, there are distinctions among discourses: scientific, metaphysical, philosophy, socio-ethical, etc. There are often references to the range of conceptual practices, such as evaluative, descriptive, prescriptive, and decisive, and how these function individually and socially. Further differentiations are noted between normative and factual principles, among values, identities, and imaginative processes, and how these relate to power, empowerment, disempowerment, and more. These are in addition to the issues of colonization of place, person, thought, and embodiment. Postmodern research is fastidiously detailed on the multiple ways in which the array of processes mentioned above have been, and are, complicit in racism, imperialism, and colonialism. Postmodern perspicacity offers astounding intellectual contributions to these times. However, there are limitations to consider, and several postmodern impasses I will suggest.

In general, and too simplistically, there is an acute awareness that new images, processes, epistemologies, and assessments of our era are needed. Huggan and Tiffin in *Green Postcolonialism* say it well: "Such a radical re-imagining, involving as it does both ontological and epistemological revision, can only be achieved by replacing discrete disciplines within interdisciplinary networks" (Huggan and Tiffin 2007, 6–7). However, it seems to me that oftentimes these discussions do not "reimage and reconfigure." They analyze, evaluate, critique, and denounce. They reveal the dangers, the urgency, and need. But they are loath to actually reimage and reconfigure, having exposed the jeopardies.

A second impasse is a result of the justifiable suspicion of "coherence," noting this has been extremely fruitful in recognizing and supporting radical diversity and polydoxy. Yet a consequence can be an absence of agreed reference points and a fragmentation of solidarity. In some ways, postmodern principles render political communities disjointed, rife with identity politics often seen, and dismissed, as "special interest groups." Common ground and the common good are difficult to affirm. One of the unintended consequences of the postmodern project is a strengthening of the hegemonies and homogenies it is trying to resist.

Hegemony is oppressive. It is imperative to protect cultural identities, diversity, and democracy. However, to embrace polydoxy as an ideal thwarts shared ethical assessments and prioritizing communal values. It discourages unifying visions, and can overpower collective action. While all voices are important, not all views are equally informed or have common priorities. There is an ethical frailty to postmodern pluralities and the polydoxy impasse. Within this collage of postmodern proposals, there are some who recognize that entering farther into the swirl of multiplicities and differentiations is not generating a way forward.

A Way Forward: Postmodern Proposals, Biodemocracy, and the Earth Charter

Postcolonial cultures continue to seek autonomy, self-determination and governance, and ecological and economic control. It is an ongoing struggle to resist past and present forms of cultural imperialism. In many contexts, there are efforts to retrieve cultural customs that were repressed. In Canada, for example, many indigenous communities work persistently to revive languages and traditions, against many odds. This is while they fight for treaty settlements, defend self-governance, and acquire minimal control over education, environmental resources, and economic independence in their territories. They are continuously having to protect their rights against the past and present actions of the Canadian governments and homogonizing globalization influences. The movement Idle No More is a good example of these realities (http://www.idlenomore.ca/). One can readily understand why local priorities should trump (what is presumed to be) a global-centric view.

In tandem with the local partiality, as postmodernity confronts modernity, "globalization" has been a topic of intense debate. Some see globalization principally as an economic process that represents capitalist expansion in a new form. Others highlight the mesh of political, cultural, and economic dimensions, noting that different emphases and influences exist in distinct places, and with varying results (Heise 2008, 1–11). There are extensive debates on these themes.

Nonetheless, it is a fair assessment that the global and the local have not received equal attention. The suspicion of the global and the prioritizing of the local have resulted in a dismissal or diminishment of global aspects, rendering invisible the complex inter-relatedness and tensions between global and local factors. Yet it is readily visible that the forces and ideologies propelling ecological ruin are often global, while lived contextually and locally. Furthermore, the extent of ecological interconnections is only beginning to be understood, accompanied by the realization that national and political boundaries can hinder responses to ecological issues. Climate change, and the failure to adequately react, is a good example of this.

While globalization has been meticulously considered, it is my view that "the globe" has received scant attention. The Earth, planet, biosphere or any other connotation for the globe in its ecological dimensions, is scarcely evident. Certainly there are considerable place-based environmental investigations, but often the focus is on identity, or the local/social constructions of nature, or other aforementioned foci. While these are important, there seems to be a dearth of ecological attention, perhaps literacy, in a considerable number of postmodern discourses.

Many ecological problems cannot be grappled with contextually and locally. The difficulties are global in scope and the players are trans- or multinational. Some pertinent concerns include land grabs, corporate rights to fresh water sources or icebergs, energy (transnational pipelines), mining licenses, intellectual properties, food insecurities and corporate ownership of food, environmental refugees (the number of whom surpasses that of political refugees), environmental illnesses (allergies, cancers, attention deficits, disrupted thought), pervasive, systemic and intractable poverty, and transgenic animals (a global billion dollar industry). These issues require several disciplines to understand, and cross many contexts and countries. They are global, local, and contextual, as well as political, economic, and ecological realities.

Three fundamental insights are converging. One is the analysis of the global influences on local ecological concerns, as mentioned above. Few significant ecological problems reside only within local contexts, immune from global economic pressures or effects. The second insight is that cultural and political borders are distinct from ecological boundaries. Ecological systems are dynamic, and ecosystems themselves can be local, bioregional, and continental; they can also participate in planetary systems and dynamics. Ecological literacy requires we understand natural and biotic processes, including at the planetary level. Third, although ecological devastation is of utmost concern, learning about the natural world—bioregional, biospheric, and planetary dynamics—dazzles. Many "awaken" to the natural world in ways never before experienced. The beauty, elegance, intricacy, diversity, resilience, and complexity of the Earth are astounding. From evolutionary processes to the intelligence of animals, the utterly breathtaking

natural developments out of which we emerged and within which we are immersed become an insight of immense, even principal, significance. It has the power to rouse and revise an ecological imagination and galvanize energy for ecological protection. The potency of this third insight, in conjunction with the previous two, is the impetus and guiding principle of the Earth Charter Initiative.

It is conspicuous that most postmodern discourses avoid engaging with, and largely ignore, the Earth Charter, or other similar initiatives that are envisioning the global in a new manner. Still, these insights are slowly infiltrating postmodern proposals. A different approach to the global and local is developing, inclusive of postmodern reservations about what passes for a global proposal, but with a planetary/ecological mindfulness. This "new global" is not about a universal solution, but a new form of global awareness. It signals the end of an era, and the beginning of another.

The following samples offer some impressions of how a new understanding of the "global" is being posited from postmodern quarters previously occupied with local, contextual diversities and subjectivities. Coming from literary studies and ecocriticism, Ursula Heise, in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, suggests we need to think globally anew (2008). She assesses that postmodern ecocriticism must now be conscious of and attentive to the interplay of local, regional, and global dimensions. We require a "sense of the planet." For this she develops eco-cosmopolitanism: a theoretically informed negotiation of the notion of planet, place, space, risk, and cultural mediation. Drawing from the theories of "risk culture" and "world risk society," and in particular Ulrich Beck's "Cosmopolitan Manifesto," Heise explores and details the possibilities of novel, transnational forms of solidarity and community on the basis of shared risk exposure. In a somewhat deterritorialized world, a fusion of local and global imaginaries is required (2008, 9).

A few more examples illustrate the point, noting that these phrases are detached from their substantial texts. In *Death of A Discipline*, Gayatri Spivak suggests that rather than being global agents we should imagine ourselves as planetary subjects. We should see ourselves as creatures rather than global entities, inhabiting a planet that is merely on loan to us (2003, 73). In *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, Roos and Hunt use the terms globalism, global community, earth community, and world narratives (2010). Throughout the book, they, albeit tentatively, venture into the need to add these to their postmodern agenda.

In various essays from *Postcolonial Ecologies*, there are references to the necessity of a new ecological imagination, mythmaking, and ecological aesthetics (Deloughrey and Handley 2011). Several authors draw on the work of Edward Said, and his concern for a poetic, world-making imagination. Another productive pathway has been the works of Edouard

Glissant, and those who consider an "aesthetic of the earth" to be essential (Bergman and Eaton 2011; DeLoughrey and Handley 2011, 1–39).

As mentioned earlier, in *The Environmental Imagination* Buell claimed that a transformed environmental imagination could counteract the environmental crisis. He understood this crisis to be personal and social, internal and external, and political and artistic (Azzarello 2012, 58). Buell saw the task of reimaging nature and humanity's relation to it as an ethical imperative and a political necessity for a *global civilization*. To this, Deane Curtin added the notion of global ecological citizenship, which augmented both ecological discourses and political theories on citizenship (Curtin 2002; Melo-Escrihuela 2008). Ecological or environmental citizenship has gained interest and traction, and is now a mainstay within green politics and green democracy efforts.

The trajectories of postmodern philosophy have equally been constructive. In *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis*, Arran Gare notes that while Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome offers some promise of a new way of grasping problems, it also needs to provide an effective orientation for the global environmental crisis. This is not a simple task, as it involves consciously and actively overcoming both the tyranny of the corporatocracy and our tendency to fetishize abstractions and replacing them with a "global order of communities of communities." Although not clear what this latter means, or how to achieve it, there is same perception of a global dimension comprising multitudes of diversities.

Gare's thought moves further in this direction in "The Grand Narrative of the Age of Re-embodiments: Beyond Modernism and Postmodernism" (2013). Gare fears that unless there is a unifying narrative, encased in democratic principles and actions, then civilizations, humanity, and most terrestrial life are threatened. He clarifies the necessity and role of a grand narrative—the nemesis of postmodernity—for any hope in a viable planetary future. Gare writes that it is the:

> . . . liberating mission of the grand narrative for re-embodiment, exemplified by the quest for Inclusive Democracy, Earth Democracy, Ecological Civilization, or for an Ecozoic Age. The grand narrative of the Age of Re-embodiments is shown to be inseparable from the struggle for truth, justice and liberty as central to real democracy empowering people to augment rather than undermine the conditions for life. (2013, 327)

Gare makes the case that a comprehensive understanding of the world is required, not only to counter the hegemony of capitalism, but also for us to be meaningfully situated in the world as a whole. He carefully argues how a grand narrative can function to protect and revive democracy, and to re-empower people as situated. This represents a new development of democracy, at a global and planetary level, because we need an account of the history of democracy in the broader context of nature. For Gare, this

refers to a development of cultures of democracy embedded in the historical trajectory of nature. The gist is that there is a broader context of nature, and that the world is only partially formed by human ideas and models of the world. It is a cultural disease to take these models as a source of reality. The reality is that we are members of socio-political and ecological communities, and thus both must be present in our self understanding and organizing. He writes: "It is necessary to re-embed humanity in nature so that in their everyday lives people appreciate the beauty of, adjust to and augment the dynamics, resilience and creativity of the ecosystems of which they are part" (2013, 350).

There is much more in the postmodern pools. However, these give an indication of the point of the article. This global-local alliance is developing, with distinct language and precision, and a shared perception that global must be ecological, planetary, and Earthly. These are the conditions for an ecological future: an ecological planetary civilization(s). Herein lies the potential of biodemocracy, democracy being the public negotiation of a future direction. The Earth Charter and similar initiatives signal the negotiation of a viable future.

The Earth Charter Initiative

The idea for an Earth charter has had several decades of history (The Earth Charter Initiative, http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/). In 1968, Maurice Strong and Mikhail Gorbachev were galvanized when the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development envisioned a charter to guide the move toward sustainable development. A decade after the Stockholm Declaration, a World Charter for Nature (1982) was adopted by United Nations member states endorsing "five principles of conservation by which all human conduct affecting nature is to be guided and judged." From the charter, these are:

1. Nature shall be respected and its essential processes shall not be impaired.
2. The genetic viability on the earth shall not be compromised; the population levels of all life forms, wild and domesticated, must be at least sufficient for their survival, and to this end necessary habitats shall be safeguarded.
3. All areas of the earth, both land and sea, shall be subject to these principles of conservation; special protection shall be given to unique areas, to representative samples of all the different types of ecosystems and to the habitats of rare or endangered species.
4. Ecosystems and organisms, as well as the land, marine and atmospheric resources that are utilized by man, shall be managed to achieve and maintain optimum sustainable productivity, but not in

such a way as to endanger the integrity of those other ecosystems or species with which they coexist.

5. Nature shall be secured against degradation caused by warfare or other hostile activities.

This charter, basically an ecological ethic, was directed not only to nation-states but also to citizens worldwide. The overall tone was concerned with moral rather than legal responsibilities to protect the natural world, which each citizen must assume. Although an important step, this charter has been largely ignored. In 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the Rio Declaration became the statement of the achievable consensus at that time. It fell short of even the World Charter for Nature, yet rekindled interest in an Earth charter.

The Earth Charter, completed in 2000, is a global consensus document. It was discussed, revised, and endorsed by more than 110 countries, involving thousands of people. It is the most negotiated document in human history. The final text was approved at a meeting of the Earth Charter Commission at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations in Paris in March 2000. Since then it is at the center of multiple further initiatives.

Overall, the Earth Charter is a "declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century." The Charter, although brief, emphasizes that global interdependence and shared responsibilities for "the human family and the larger living world" are the global tasks. In the midst of great diversities, humanity and the larger community of Earth life share a common destiny. For global partnerships, there needs to be a global vision, an ethical foundation, shared values, and common ground. The preamble addresses the fact that humanity is part of a larger evolving universe, within the complex biosphere of Earth. This understanding of "global" is one reason why the Charter is unique and of immense import. Common ground and a global vision are also due to the inequities and limits of economic globalization, the undeniable emergence of a global civil society, and an urgent need to develop a sense of responsibility for the whole Earth community. The four pillars of the Earth Charter are as follows: Respect and Care for the Community of Life; Ecological Integrity; Social and Economic Justice; and Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace. Each pillar supports principles and clarifications that offer a way forward. Ecological integrity and democracy are woven throughout, with specific foci on democratic processes, political participation, social, economic and gender justice, political, cultural and economic rights, and a commitment to nonviolence. In spite of the brevity, it is a very detailed document. There is considerable other information about the Earth Charter vision, orientation, and principles.

All the topics examined in this article are found within the Earth Charter. The myriad postmodern concerns and critiques are addressed, with particular attention to the global-local and universal-contextual dialectics. The Earth Charter realizes that we need a coherent orientation that takes into account the ethical entanglements that postmodernists expose. The Earth Charter is a straightforward, well developed as a set of principles. It is a global platform, which offers an orientation and ethical framework for a viable future. It is skeletal, but not simplistic. It is a postmodern document—negotiated not imposed—that recognizes both the harms of modernity and the impasses of postmodern critiques. The Earth Charter is one contribution, worthy of our attention, study, and promotion. It is a global biodemocratic vision, in a postmodern world.

Other similar initiatives are developing. The Charter of Human Responsibilities developed by SADED, previously mentioned, is similar, as is that of Earth Democracy, advanced by Vandana Shiva. The latter has Ten Principles of Justice, Sustainability and Peace. All concur that the Earth can no longer be seen as a set of resources but rather as a community of life. Equity, justice, diversity, and peace are foundational. Shiva refers her proposal as a *democracy of life.* Other communities and organizations are developing comparable charters, policies, and programs with a similar vision and purpose.

There is much appeal to these charters that respond to the desire, from some, for a global ethics "that blends respect for diverse human cultures (as a cosmopolitan virtue) and respect for the non-human and natural world (as an ecological virtue)" (MacGregor 2004, 90). They signal a change in vision, and a new moment in human history. In general terms, they share an ethical appeal and vision for the common good of humanity, while diminishing an anthropocentric bias and strengthening the notion of a planetary ecological community.

There are debates to be had, such as the consequence of emphasizing vision, values, and ethics over politics and economic power relations and structures. Issues of national sovereignty as well as global environmental citizenship are far from being determined theoretically or engaged practically. The hidden possibilities of green imperialism cannot be overlooked. Do "global vision" projects that attempt to unite local communities around a common global vision result in disempowering politics at the local level? Dozens of discussions and disputes are possible. The purpose of this article is to suggest that it is time to engage with them.

The Earth Charter is traveling on its own trajectory, gaining interest and momentum, spawning hundreds of secondary publications and vast virtual library and resources. Both the Earth Charter Secretariat and Network Activities are operating, in every facet of life and all over the world. The Earth Charter in Action is an impressive array of accomplishments (http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/).

We are reminded by Ulrich Beck, in *What Is Globalization*? that "we stand at a threshold where not only catastrophes, but also cosmopolitan societies, are possible. To overlook this "also-possibility" by focusing only on the catastrophes is an unrealistic attitude. I would expressly add, however, that unwavering skepticism in response to overhasty optimism about the pacification of world society is the necessary precondition for this also-possibility to be seized" (2000, 110–11).

Postmodern discourses have provided unwavering skepticism, and are not prone to overhasty optimism. However, the Earth Charter has seized this "also-possibility" and is running with it. Similar charters are developing. Postmodernists carry on calling for these initiatives, and yet ignore the most significant contribution. One scholar, noted for her work on ecological citizenship, Sherilyn MacGregor, briefly examined the Earth Charter in 2004. Although both appreciating as well as raising concerns about the Earth Charter, she wrote: "I find it troubling that the 'Earth Charter' does not allow much room for skepticism" (2004, 94). I find this utterly baffling. The success of the Earth Charter, its "global" traction and growing activities, points to the need for, and effectiveness of, such orienting global visions.

Conclusion

The article has considered the perception that new images, processes, epistemologies, and assessments of our era are needed to find a way forward in a culturally diverse, yet global world and interconnected Earth. In light of a rising interest in biodemocracy and the challenges to current democracies, supplements from ecological postmodernism enhanced the potential of biodemocracy. The acuity of analyses from some postmodern proposals was emphasized, along with insights and impasses. The Earth Charter is presented as offering a way forward, within the diversities and complexities of a postmodern world and differentiated yet interconnected Earth community. It is time the postmodernists pay attention. Their acumen, with less skepticism, would be appreciated.

Notes

A version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in a panel titled "Biodemocracy: Religion, Democracy, and the Earth Charter in the 21st Century" (November 23rd, 2013).

1. Ursula Franklin at the University of Toronto, in a conference in 1998, discussed the occupation of Canada by "an army of marketeers" (foreign and local), suffering from "moral dyslexia."

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