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THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF AN UNBOUND DEMOS

Democracy is most commonly understood as rule by the people, and from the people, laws are made, rulers are chosen, and action is taken to protect the rights and freedoms of those people. What is commonly overlooked is how the people who participate in the democracy — or demos — are chosen. Democratic theorists historically have assumed that the territorial boundaries of the state bind the demos. More recently, democratic theorists have looked further into and questioned this assumption's cogency through the ideas of *affected interests* and *coercion.*

In this paper, I intend to use the works of Sarah Song, Arash Abizadeh, and Frederick G. Whelan to show that, in fact, the demos is best bound by modern ideas of the territorial state. While the *Coercion* *Principle*'s theories are undoubtedly valid, the extent to which they reach creates an impossible demos for a government to consult effectively.

Thanks to the ongoing immigration crisis in the west, one can see how one country's border policy can affect countless others. In Abizadeh’s Democratic Theory and Border Coercion, they outline the idea that a democracy following the theory of popular sovereignty cannot both unilaterally & legitimately control its borders. According to Abizadeh, anyone who accurately follows the democratic theory of political legitimation domestically is bound to refuse the unilateral domestic right to administer or seal the state's boundaries. Abizadeh defines the core value of both democratic theory and liberalism as personal autonomy, thus being coerced revokes that right. Being coerced can hinder an agent's autonomy in 3 ways. First, cohesion simply reduces the capacity for an agent to develop essential mental capacities. Second, it reduces the options that would, without being coerced, be available to the agent. Third, the precondition for autonomy, independence is *invariably* violated when subject to coercion (Abizadeh, 2008). Abizadeh thus proposes that to mitigate the coercive influence of a state, it must consider those affected by way of a democratic forum. In other words, by the democratic theory of popular sovereignty, political power's coercive effects must be democratically justified.

Furthermore, the border control of a state is subjected to both citizens and foreigners of the state. Therefore the justification of border control must be democratically posed to both members and non-members of the state (Abizadeh, 2008). However, it is important to note that Abizadeh's argument refrains explicitly from referring to *all those affected* when speaking of who deserves to be part of the state's demos when subjected to state coercion. A solution to this conundrum would be, as Abizadeh proposed, to instate cosmopolitan democratic institutions that would allow for a democratic forum where both citizens and foreigners could be delegated control. These democratic forums would give rise to a Global Demos, which would allow for a more fair and equal global border control regime that would take into account those affected to varying degrees.

For many, this progression towards a global demos without clear boundaries makes for an unwieldy democracy. In this camp, there is Song, who holds the well-established belief that the modern state and its boundaries should bind the state's demos. Song states concerns that bring not question the *coercion* and *affected interest* principles to define a states demos. Furthermore, she provides rationale in favour of binding the demos by the modern state’s territorial borders, demonstrating that it is more practical to form a voting body this way.

First, the *principle of the affected interests* is addressed. According to Song, the principle is radically inclusionary; there is no way of defining a demos if it includes all those affected without forming a global demos. A solution proposed by proponents of the theory would be to only give a vote to those whose fundamental interests are affected, but this still cannot be empirically defined as one's 'fundamental interests’ changes based on countless factors (Song, 2012). Similarly, there have been propositions where an agent gets a vote based on how much they are influenced by it, but, even barring the logistical implausibility of measuring such a thing, it still does not address the impossibly vast scope of the principle. Secondly, the *coercion* principle is brought into question (Song, 2012).

Akin to the *principle of the affected interests*, the *coercion* principle is extremely far-reaching in scope, as it encompasses all those coerced by policy enacted by a government. For example, would it be reasonable to include the numerous countries coerced by the US within its own demos? Furthermore, would it also be reasonable to include all those undocumented immigrants within the US whose policy coerces them every day? As a way of reducing the scope, one could assume those most affected by the coercion of the state are its citizens and, as such, should have the greatest say over it (Song, 2012). Nevertheless, the influence of powerful states cannot be overlooked; moreover, it may be true that within a desirable country, border policy affects those outside more than those within. There is always consent, However, when attempting to migrate to a state and Thus, if one wanted to avoid a state's coercion, one simply needs not to migrate there. In other words, an agent is only entitled to be a part of a demos if they are *unavoidably* involved for an extended period of time (Song, 2012). Though again, it is still hard to resist the expansionary nature of the principle, as the foreigner at the border *is* unavoidably coerced by the state’s policies, even if it is not directly by border security (Song, 2012).

Furthermore, the demand for democratic justification of coercion encompasses direct coercion and the threat of coercion. This being true, virtually every person on earth is subject to the threat of coercion by the United States. A third way to attempt to avoid the principle’s protracted implications is to give foreigners *some* but not *equal* say in the demos (Song, 2012). This could be realized by representatives of the coerced countries being present in the coercers assembly to voice their concerns, similar to how DC and Puerto Rico are represented in the US (Song, 2012). Alternatively, International law could act as a suppressant for coercive policies from one state to another (Song, 2012). Unfortunately, the coercion principle still demands that coercion needs to be justified to citizens and *all persons* coerced (Song, 2012).

So then, why should the state bind the demos? Firstly, within modern society, it is the state that guarantees its people's rights and freedoms (Song, 2012). Without the state, individuals would disagree on their rights, who has them, and when they are violated (Song, 2012). Crucially for Song’s argument is that “the modern state can meet the demands of political equality,” Which entails equal rights of political representation and autonomy as well as the conditions to provide equal opportunities to express these rights. Song suggests that not only is the state a vehicle for rights and freedoms but also a receptacle for solidarity and trust, which encourages higher participation in democracy. Furthermore, she suggests that citizens acquire a strong interest in the government's performance; this is much less likely to occur if there is a global demos or if demoi change depending on the decision being made. The system of constituency representation allows for a representative to know exactly who they are representing and, as such, voice their specific concerns (Song, 2012). If a representative’s constituents were all of humanity or changing from decision to decision, the representative would not be able to represent anyone effectively. So the answer to the question posed is this: the demos should be bounded by the territories of the state as the state ensures the conditions for democracy and acts as a predictable institution in which people can trust, thus encouraging participation in the democracy as well as holds particular representatives accountable for expressing the needs of specific people (Song, 2012).

Previously I mentioned the expansionary nature of both the principles of *affected interests* & *coercion*, but why is this undesirable for a democracy? Why not instate a global demos that takes into account the will of all those affected or coerced? Song states that a global demos or world state would either be too powerful and rule in tyranny, as there would be no equal state to keep it in check. Another scenario is that the state would be too outstretched and weak, constantly trying to put down nationalists within itself (Song, 2012). Furthermore, a global demos would dilute the voice of its members so severely that seemingly no one would have a voice but those who held power. The sheer diversity of language, history, and culture would make it near impossible for not only a world state to form, but also consistently cooperate (Song, 2012).

Whelan falls in between Song and Abizadeh as someone who believes it is democratic theory’s shortcoming that it cannot empirically say who should be included in the demos. Democratic theory cannot independently provide solutions that arise concerning boundaries. This is the case with other flavours of democratic theory like those that value participation, majority rule, consent autonomy, and the *affected interests* principle. A system of group decision-making cannot decide the group; a group is a prerequisite for decision making (Whelan, 1983).

With all these differing opinions brought forward, a clear answer may be hard to grasp. In reality, however, I believe Abizadeh and Song speak about two different realms of politics: Abizadeh, speaking in the theoretical, and Song in the realistic. Abizadeh would like to see an ideal democracy, whereas Song is concerned with the practical. Abizadeh's aim is to prove a justified democracy, and Song's is to prove a just democracy. One may even say that the problems brought forward by Abizadeh are not real democratic problems but a reflection of the current state of democratic affairs and can only be solved with an ideal democracy. For example, if all persons are given an equal say in the demos, policies of the state can be overused by foreigners who have no personal interest in them or underused by citizens who do not feel adequately represented. This may be the cause for many democracies with declining interest in voting. Not only this, but it would also make it much harder to enforce laws or levy taxes as policies would have to represent the interests of so many people.

Just as people cannot live in anarchy as they do not share any common ground, it is impossible to create a democracy with a global demos or a world state. If this was possible, there would be no need for countries and states, only a single global authority.

Whelan's view that democratic theory cannot provide a solution for defining the demos is true enough, but democratic theory can provide us a practical guide on how to best operate a democracy. The demos, as well as its boundaries are not something that is set in stone; they are something still being decided, or should I say, being fought for.

In present-day society, boundaries exist for all kinds of reasons. Some have practical benefits, like a wall keeping out an invading army, while some boundaries have more to do with identity and community, like a fence separating those who live in a gated community from those outside. As evident in the examples above, boundaries exist not merely as a means to keep people out but to keep people in as well. As such they should also act as the binding force of the demos as, while the people of a state may not be the only ones affected, they are the most the most affected and easily defined.

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