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Introduction - Volume 6, Issue 1

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Democratic processes have faced numerous challenges in a number of countries globally. There have been calls for broader inclusions in democratic processes, particularly at economic, political and social levels. Large parts of populations feel left out by democracy as it is practiced in many countries given that it seems to center on political efficiency and capitalist model of economic development, which does not devolve wealth to the majority of the citizens. According to The 2021 Economic Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (2022) less than half the world's population (45.7%) live in a democracy, which is a significant decline from 2020 when it stood at 49.4%. Only 6.4% of the world's population live in 'full democracy', a very small percentage. According to 2021 Afrobarometer report "while average levels of public support for democracy across Africa have remained high, satisfaction with the way democracy works has plummeted over the past decade – to just 41% across 34 countries" (Afrobarometer, 2021). The concern therefore is not so much on whether we need democracy but rather on the kind of democracy the people want – a democracy that respect citizen participation; guarantees fundamental human rights; respects human dignity across races, religion, cultures and nations; embraces fair distribution of economic and national resources; upholds social inclusion, protects the environment and makes efforts to address climate change concerns, among other practices.

This special issue on democracy and political change examines the extent to which democracy has been practiced in different countries and how it has or has not contributed to better organization of the society. *Hassan Hussein* examines how young women in authoritarian contexts utilize self-created social networks as unconventional avenues to learn and advance their civic and political participation. The author places the question of the pedagogical and political consequences of social capital into an analysis of women's social interactions within social networks. *Elias Opongo* interrogates the extent to which democratic practice in Kenya is meeting people's expectation and whether it contributes to economic wellbeing and peace stability in the country. Based on a field research conducted in the country, the study shows that most respondents appreciated the fact that the Kenya has made good democratic progress over the years, particularly after the promulgation of the 2010 Constitution that instituted more freedoms and socio-political accountability. However, respondents were keen to see better economic progress that would change citizen's quality of life and enhance economic progress.

Gloria Na'antoe Longba'am-Alli examines the concept of 'everyday peace' by discussing the local agency in managing ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt. She asserts that everyday peace recognizes people's commentaries and practices shaping their resistance, resilience, and negotiation with conflicting groups. Hence, she concludes that the people of Nigeria's Middle Belt use everyday peace as the hidden script where acts of avoidance, domination, and resistance occur. *Gail Presbey* discusses women's rights and citizenship in Kenya since Independence and draws attention to women's social, political and cultural engagement in social change through diverse mechanisms of negotiating with the patriarchy. She argues that it would be wrong to oversimplify the Kenyan context as one in which women are "behind" in some sense and attempting to catch up to men without conducting a much deeper analysis of socio-cultural nuances and women's persistent agency for change. *Dhinakaran Savariyar* essay calls for a transformational agency in a Hindu dominated

democracy. He asserts that the antagonistic constructions of Hindu nationalism against religious minorities tend to deny Christians religious freedom, which is both a constitutional and human right for the citizens of India. Thus, the author reiterates that in the face of aggressive Hindu nationalism, it is important to explore an overview of Christian conception of religious freedom as a theoretical touchstone which is important for the analysis of factors that attempt to forge a religious homogeneity in India.

These articles demonstrate that there is a high level of awareness on what democracy should achieve and the kinds of needs democracy should respond to. Social freedoms are just as important as economic freedoms, and the two ought to be analyzed simultaneously. At the same time the success of democracy is pegged on social inclusion where different religions, races, cultures, genders, nationalities and affiliations feel included at all levels of the society. The articles in this special issue demonstrate that efforts towards realizing social cohesion within the prism of political change, democratic practice and integral economic development have applied different strategies to achieve the same goal of social inclusion.

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