

Interview - Daniele Archibugi

Written by E-International Relations

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Daniele Archibugi is research director at the Italian National Research Council (CNR) in Rome and Professor of Innovation, Governance and Public Policy at the University of London. He graduated in economics at the University of Rome “La Sapienza” and later took his D.Phil. at the University of Sussex. He also advised and conducted research projects for a range of institutions, among others the European Union, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the OECD. His two main areas of research are cosmopolitan democracy and the economics of innovation. About the former he wrote two important books: *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens: Toward Cosmopolitan Democracy* and *Global Democracy: Normative and Empirical Perspectives*. In both he argues for extending democracy into the international sphere. His website can be found here.

Where do you see the most exciting research/debates happening in your field?

International Relations was born and developed on the notion that the world was divided among states. Today it is widely accepted that this is not any longer the case, and probably it was not the case even when international relations theory was originally conceived. In spite of the fact that it is now widely accepted that there are transnational relations, we do not have yet a coherent understanding of the world's interconnections. Take, for example, international statistics: most of them are still centred and organized around states. I think that the major challenge of IR today is to be able to map interconnections at other level of analysis. We will need to have a better understanding on how regions, cities, companies, families and individuals are located in the global landscape.

How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?

I grew up in a world divided into West and East and we were too often told that the cold war could end with a “hot” war only. Things have fortunately evolved very differently. But already during the cold war there was something that I always found disturbing: the internal political regime of a country was not a good predictor of its foreign policy. My generation was shocked by the Vietnam War and we could not accept that America, with such a vibrant society which provided to all of us novels, music, films and ideas, could accept the crime of war and war crimes. Of course, also the Soviet Union was equally brutal internationally but somehow we found that there was coherence: it was a brutal regime internally as well as externally.

Some colleagues argue that the real reason why the United States was so brutal internationally was because it had to contain the Soviet diffusion. The Soviet nightmare collapsed a quarter of a century ago, but unfortunately the USA has continued to maintain a similar brutal foreign policy, as the Iraq wars sadly shows. The difference between the democratic reasons of internal regimes and their foreign policies continues to dominate the world.

Could you explain the concept of cosmopolitan democracy? And since a major critique of it is its supposed utopianism, how could elements of it be realistically put into practice?

From what I have said before, it seems to me clear that in my analysis I tend to be a realist rather than idealist. But

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from the normative viewpoint, if we do not dream we will never be able to obtain what we would like. No realist was able to predict the fall of the Berlin Wall or the 2007 financial crisis. Both realists and utopians are equally blind in front of major changes in world politics. At least, utopians commit to what they desire.

Cosmopolitan democracy seems a rather obvious perspective for everybody that is supporting democracy. Why should democracy be a viable system of governance for a city or a state but not at the global level? Of course, to elaborate the model required a lot of efforts: which competences should be devolved to global institutions and what should continue to be a prerogative of national governments? How to regulate the relationships between global, national and local institutions? In which way would a cosmopolitan democracy differ from confederal and federal systems of states? I am pleased that there is a huge generation of young scholars that are continuing to develop it. I see a lot of work carried out on the role of judicial institutions, on the contribution of non-governmental organizations, on the possible reform of the existing international organizations.

You state that many democratic states suffer from “democratic schizophrenia”, what do you mean by this?

Apparently, it is still considered normal by the majority of political theorists and by almost all politicians that a democratic government would do certain things at home and others abroad. I have labelled this attitude democratic schizophrenia. It is a form that occurs in plenty of occasions. Let me mention the targeted killings through drones: why does the FBI not use drones to kill mafia criminals in the USA? Apparently, the answer is quite obvious, namely because internally it is considered unacceptable that the government carries out extra-judicial executions. But when you target suspected terrorists in poor countries these executions become perfectly normal and they are even welcomed by large portions of the public opinion. Only a few voices have pointed out at the existence of so-called collateral damages (i.e. killing innocents whose only sin is to be in the wrong place at the wrong time). If we really want to get rid of this schizophrenia, democratic governments should not do abroad actions that what they would not do at home.

Recently the United Nations turned 70, what is the future of the institution and should it be reformed, if yes how?

The United Nations has constantly contributed to a better world. Without the UN many major processes of the last 70 years, including decolonization and peaceful resolution of disputes, would have been much more difficult. The UN has, above all, contributed to socialize political élites and world citizens to the idea that there is a world community.

Of course, the UN could and should do much more. It has collected many failures. Too often it is dominated by incompetent bureaucrats. This is the reason why it needs to be reformed at all levels. The first is, of course, the political level. We need a more representative Security Council which is not dominated by the veto of five states. The second is by giving access to the world citizenry through an elected parliament. I strongly support the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA).

The real problem is that individual governments are very reluctant to give more resources and more power to the UN. We can blame the UN, but above all we should blame the governments that are not yet prepared to give to the UN the political role we need.

What is your opinion on humanitarian interventions, particularly the Libyan case seeing how it received support from the UN Security Council?

I am afraid, we have not yet collected good examples of effective humanitarian interventions. From Libya to Syria the so-called international community has obtained more fiascos than successes. This is also due to lack of resources, but also to the idea that it is enough to use air-strikes and military force to solve the problem. We do not yet have

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institutions, infrastructures and competences that could be used to prevent warfare and to re-create the conditions for social and economic development. The war in Afghanistan started 14 years ago, the war in Iraq 12 years ago. Can we call any of these cases good examples of peace-building processes? Is anybody asking why there have been so huge failures?

I have suggested that the UN should be equipped for humanitarian interventions, but these should not be limited to wars and conflicts. There is the need for humanitarian interventions also in cases of natural disasters. In these cases it is clear that the army might be needed, but what is really needed is a social infrastructure of doctors and teachers, architects and firemen. If the UN is successful in these cases, perhaps after a decade could also gain the authority to intervene in civil wars. And in the meanwhile, it will be enough to stop arms trade.

There have been many debates on the limits of sovereignty when concerning violations of human rights, yet on the other hand sovereignty has sometimes been used as a mobilizing principle against undemocratic behaviour in the international arena. How do you relate to the concept of sovereignty?

I think that the concept of sovereignty is today empty. Nobody is sovereign. All political players are highly interconnected and there is no government today committed to a genuine respect of sovereignty. I do not think that to go back to a XIX century concept of sovereignty could actually prevent any abuse committed by the powerful states. It is not by evoking sovereignty that we could prevent the United States, France and the United Kingdom from bombing Libya. But perhaps if we would have held accountable their governments to their actions, this could have made their leaders more cautious. In other words, sovereignty is something of the past, and we need to substitute it with a global constitutionalism where each player is accountable for its actions. The problem is how to reinforce this constitutionalism, and how to make it costly for individual players to misuse their power.

You mentioned in an interview that during your youth you were part of the Marxist left, and I was wondering if you could elaborate on your participation in it and how you relate today to Marxist thinking.

What I have learnt from Marxism is that problems cannot be solved within states. After all, Marx was also among the founders of the International Workingmen's Association. There was a strong XIX century spirit against nationalism which, unfortunately, was unable to prevent the outbreak of First World War. But I think that the responsibility to generate a global society is not in a class, but rather of all the individuals that perceive a global responsibility.

Broadly speaking your two areas of research have been technological innovation and global governance, how do these two relate to one another?

I teach a course in London devoted to Globalization. In this course, there is space for my own interest on innovation as well as global governance. They are two separate academic disciplines but I see both of them devoted to the study of change in a rather turbulent world.

What is the most important advice you could give to young scholars of International Relations?

My main advice is to be creative and to take into account the relevance of the issue studied. In IR and, more generally, in social sciences, there is far too much research, often carried out with the use of sophisticated techniques, that addresses irrelevant issues. I think that a young scholar should make sure that what he or she investigates is also relevant to better understand our world. Bearing in mind that understanding should also be functional to transform the world we live in.

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This interview was conducted by Tom Cassauwers. Tom is an Associate Features Editor of E-IR.