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## Book Review

### IMPORTING DEMOCRACY: THE ROLE OF NGOS IN SOUTH AFRICA, TAJIKISTAN AND ARGENTINA

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**By Julie F. Melton, Kettering Foundation Press, Ohio, 2013. pp. 394. ISBN: 978-0-923993-47-4. USD 24.95**

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Democracy or democratization projects either instituted by governmental leaders and or by civil society or by individual personalities have become the relevant celebrated concepts after the collapse of the bipolar international system in the early 1990s as capitalism triumph over communism. Although, democracy as a concept is as old as the ancient Greek, many writings would suggest that the very idea of democracy was already been practiced in various places in the world even prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Primitive as may be labeled, ancient civilizations embodied in themselves some elements of democracy.

Moreover, in spite of this development, not a two nations share the same level of democratic achievements even the most advanced democratic countries in the world. This claim is precisely illustrated by Julie Fisher's work on Democracy as she tried to explain the democratization process in three countries, namely; South Africa, Argentina, and Tajikistan.

Although, the idea of democratization in the above mentioned countries was influenced by external development and had mainly originated from developed Western countries, Fisher argues that there are however evidences that suggest the presence of some democratic elements embedded in the traditional cultural values of the peoples of South Africa, Argentina and Tajikistan. While nations or group of ethnic minorities are consolidating indigenous democratic values to form a national identity, these values are too weak to be noticed by the status quo. Governments are too occupied with

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their preferred agenda which do not necessarily come along with traditions.

The South African experience of Apartheid which favors the supremacy of the while from the native blacks had prevented this country from inclusively allowing nationwide participation and transparency in which all South Africans may have equal access to health, education, political formation, and economic advancement. Although, vibrant and less corrupt government as compared to Argentina and Tajikistan, South African civil societies are still limited in their success in achieving greater democratic emancipation.

The socio-economic problems that have encountered by its people; poverty and health crisis such as the endemic HIV/AIDS, have all become the focus of national effort by various civil societies. The Economic liberalization sponsored by the state, which encourages wider participation and benefits had not produced an impressive results to address the socio-economic issues. Indeed there is a co-relation between addressing these issues to a wider issue of democratization in that country. Democratization in South Africa is not simply an easy task to achieve but would require resilient efforts by prioritizing its socio-economic challenges.

While South African government is relatively efficient, Argentina's democratization NGOs and civil societies confront not only the corrupt legal system but also the national political body-the government. The challenge for them is how Argentineans, officials and private citizens alike- can graduate from the Peronian ideology. Since its defeat, civil societies in Argentina are taking a vigorous lead to campaign for a transparent government, people's wider participation, and discourage corruption.

Media has become an instrument to many civil societies to advance its advocacy for wider democratization. Media has become a medium to promote public discourse in various issues such as human rights, socio-culture and the economy.

A revelation of somehow unique story of democratization in Tajikistan is also included in the book. Although true, as the author would argue, that authoritarianism defines the political landscape of the country, it does not however neglect the fact that *a strong participatory tradition* is also present especially at the local level.

Perhaps the 'Soviet legacy' could explain why civil society and democratization NGOs cannot take a strong hold in this country. Although women's groups seemed to be active in Tajikistan and were contributing to ending civil war and had initiated a sustained dialogue with various sectors, its influence is not however that significant as compared to South Africa and Argentina. Despite successful attempt by women's group to promote awareness on anti-trafficking and opposition to capital punishment, these NGOs were unable foster influence in the country's legal system. Distrust among this NGOs; lack of financial support ; and the hesitation of the Tajik government to respond more participatory election, transparency, etc., limit success in the democratization project in that country.

The three-country examples provided by the book would best exemplify three different contextual spheres into which democratization is put into question: one is how effective can indigenous element of globalization be used to supplement imported values? Second is how imported democratized elements can successfully take root in these countries and third is what will be the role of the state actors, civil society and democratizing NGOs in mating, molding and promoting local and imported values so that a guarantee for an efficient democratic project can be achieved and sustained in the future.

Truly, as put forward by the author, "South Africa, Tajikistan and Argentina could all import created ideas from each other." In spite of differences of political terrain these countries have, it is quite possible that each country hold unique democratic strengths including weaknesses in their national historical experience. Each of these strengths can actually be learnt by among themselves to supplement current initiatives being undertaken by various civil society, and democratization NGOs including national and local public initiatives for a more participatory and transparent governance.

Given the rise of transnational civil society with huge financial asset and given the enduring trends towards creating a common "culture with broadly shared values," it is not too far for these countries to change their own societies and governments to adapt to a more democratic change.

Although, this seem achievable, it is also arguably possible that levels of a more democratic achievement may timely differ from one another.

One reason perhaps is how resisting local values are in accommodating imported values. Secondly, issues such as the readiness of ideational and material elements in every country which would fast track democratization must be considered. In any form and method of directing a country towards democratization, it is prudent that the general public will actively involve. The government should use all its assets to foster mind -conditioning of the public on why democracy is best for them. Along with this, political will shall be directed towards proper institutional reform in the country. Eventually, financial support from international civil societies and organization will possibly double, if national efforts are genuinely directed towards change and sustainable development in which government, civil society and democratization NGOs and individuals will laboriously supplement their effort together.