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# Occupy the Social Contract! Participatory Democracy and Iceland's Crowd-Sourced Constitution

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## Abstract

Recent responses to the global economic crash of 2008, such as Occupy Wall Street and other political movements, have challenged the "we" of contemporary political theory and practice. This article analyzes the theory and practice of recent participatory democracy movements, such as the building of a new social contract in Iceland. It argues that this new social contract is a meaningful response to the global economic crisis.

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# Notes

<sup>1</sup> Myles Horton with Judith and Herbert Kohl, *The Long Haul* (New York: The Teachers' College Press, 2007), p. 134.

The authors would like to thank Laura Black, Judith Grant, and Andrew Ross for helping us to think through the issues raised in this piece.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1988); see also Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1997); Christine Keating, *Decolonizing Democracy: Transforming the Social Contract in India* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Jodi Dean, *Communicative Capitalism and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London, UK: Verso, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> See Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970); see also C.B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977); Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, *On Democracy* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1983); Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984); and Christine Keating, "Developmental Democracy and Its Inclusions: Globalization and the Role of Women in Culture and Society," *Journal of Women's Studies* 10 (2003): 1-15.

<sup>6</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Against Sociocultural Imperialism: A Radical Democracy* (London, UK: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Ross, *The Politics of the Imagination* (London, UK: Routledge, 2007), p. xiii. See also Ross, *The Politics of the Imagination* (London, UK: Routledge, 2007). If participatory democracy is to be a reality, it is important to recognize that participation is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It is from those who are most marginalized and know better, that managers of development organizations and projects need freedom to act quickly

to achieve results, and that people are more interested in short-term substantive livelihood improvement than participation” (Harry Taylor, “Insights into Participation from Critical Management and Labour Processes Perspectives,” in Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (eds), *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (London, UK: Zed Books, 2001), p. 138). It is not the value of participation itself but rather the terms and conditions of such participation that are at issue in progressive appraisals of contemporary development approaches.

<sup>8</sup> Carole Pateman, “Participatory Democracy Revisited,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10:1 (2012), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*; see also Mills, *The Racial Contract*; and Keating, *Decolonizing Democracy*.

<sup>10</sup> Carole Pateman, “Contract and Social Change: A Dialogue Between Carole Pateman and Charles Mills,” in Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, *Contract and Domination* (London, UK: Polity, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*; see also Mills, *The Racial Contract*.

<sup>12</sup> Keith Whittington, *Constitutional Interpretation: Textual Meaning, Original Intent, and Judicial Review* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Ayelet Shachar, *Multicultural Jurisdictions: Cultural Differences and Women's Rights* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 210. See also Ayelet Shachar, “The Thin Line between Imposition and Consent: A Critique of Birthright Membership Regimes,” *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 25 (2002), pp. 200–235.

<sup>14</sup> Shachar

<sup>15</sup> de

<sup>16</sup> SXSW

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<sup>17</sup> Patem

<sup>18</sup> SXSW

<sup>19</sup> Sylvia Swiden, “The Pots and Pans Revolution in Iceland and its Aftermath,” 2012, < <http://jhaines6.wordpress.com/2012/05/27/the-pots-and-pans-revolution-in-iceland>>.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Krugman, “The Conscience of a Liberal,” New York Times, March 30, July 8, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Haarde was subsequently found guilty of not informing his cabinet of major developments during the crisis.

<sup>22</sup> Swiden, “The Pots and Pans Revolution.”

<sup>23</sup> David Teather, “Iceland Will Vote Against Repaying UK and Netherlands in Referendum, Polls Suggest,” The Guardian, January 6, 2010; see also “Icelandic Voters Reject Icesave Debt Repayment Plan,” The Guardian, April 10, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Higgins, “Iceland Wins Major Case Over Failed Bank,” New York Times, January 28, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Lyall, “Significant Victory for Iceland,” New York Times, March 22, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Gudjon Mar Gudjonsson, “How to Organize an Authentic and Genuine Forum,” 2012, < <http://agora.is>>.

<sup>28</sup> Stjornlagarad, 2011, < <http://stjornlagarad.is/starfid/frumvarp/>>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>33</sup> SXSW

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- <sup>35</sup> Harvey Morris, "Crowdsourcing Iceland's Constitution," International Herald Tribune, October 24, 2012.
- <sup>36</sup> Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, p. 229.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 65.
- <sup>38</sup> Miguel Marques, *Pots, Pans, and Other Solutions*, 2012, 59:40, Documentary, < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGwMlpgR2A>>.
- <sup>39</sup> Dian Marino, *The Wild Garden: Art, Education, and the Culture of Resistance* (Toronto, Canada: Between the Lines Press, 1997), p. 188.
- <sup>40</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Press, 1993).
- <sup>41</sup> Morris, "Crowdsourcing Iceland's Constitution."
- <sup>42</sup> "Iceland," New York Times, July 9, 2012.
- <sup>43</sup> Sarah Lyall, "Iceland Ousts Government That Steered It Out of Crisis," New York Times, April 28, 2013.
- <sup>44</sup> Alda Sigmundsdóttir, "Iceland's Election: Voters Fear the EU More Than a Return to the Bad Old Days," The Guardian, April 26, 2013.
- <sup>45</sup> Alexandra Topping, "Reykjavík's Radical Mayor Blazes a Trail for the Revolution in Digital Democracy," The Guardian, April 25, 2013.



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