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Global Semiotics and Everyday Legal Claims

Intercultural Use of Law, Interreligious Dialogue and Translation Ethics

Call for Papers Submission

The Semiotics of Democracy and Ideologies of Meaning in Constitutional Orders

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Democracy is in crisis. The symptoms of that crisis might be found on the streets and in the public institutions of Brasilia, Brussels, Beijing, and Washington. Its signification may be performed by the masses and their shepherding elites in actions like the 6 January 2020 Commission in the US; but its fundamental character is semiotic. Democracy is a language of signification of collective social relations, formally expressed through national constitutional orders and within the supranational framing of constitutional internationalism. Its fundamental signification, the conceptual framework within which such expression is constrained, is expressed in the semiotically rich language of ideology. That ideological foundation, in turn, has fractured. Democratic ideology becomes the site for great contests about the meaning of a democratic order, and its expression within the normative orders of political and social collectives. This contribution examines one of the principal points of fracture—that between the contemporary development of a semiotics of liberal democratic democracy, and that of Marxist-Leninism. The consequences of both the construction of distinctive languages of democracy is profound—ranging among conceptions of human rights, to rule of law, the mutual inter-relationship between the individual, state and society, and the nature and character of a rules based international order. This is based on a set of remarkable documents produced by China and the US in 2021. The first section considers the semiotics of liberal democratic and Marxist-Leninist democracy, with a focus on the semiotics of endogenous and exogenous democracy (elections; consultations). It then turns to examination of the semiotics of consequences: the meaning and performance of elections, the nature of civil and political rights, and the expression of these democratic lifeworld in human rights and internationalism. The essay ends with thoughts on the methodological signification of democratic signs in analysis of democratic turn in ordering political collectives through law.