

Introduction

In 1999 and 2000, anti-capitalist protesters plagued the meetings of the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Economic Forum. In Seattle, Washington, D.C., Melbourne, and Prague, protestors took to the streets and attempted to upset and shut down the meetings of these international institutions. In a story titled “Angry and Effective,” *The Economist*, the weekly newspaper, noted that these protest groups, a combination of student-led organizations, unions, and non-governmental organizations, “claim to be acting in the interests of the people,” and particularly the world’s poor – but so do the governments and organizations they criticize. The newspaper questioned whether these groups were indeed acting in the interests of the world’s poor, arguing that forcing higher labor standards on factories in poor countries may cause those factories to move elsewhere, and encouraging debt relief can sometimes delay economic reform. At least in the West, the newspaper argued, governments are accountable to voters. Activists are not so clearly accountable to others.

What entitles these non-elected, non-formal actors to speak and act for others? As *The Economist* asked, “Who elected Oxfam?” *The Economist* was concerned that law-abiding companies and democratically elected governments were, to varying degrees, being held accountable to groups that “are unelected, unaccountable and very often unrepresentative” (2000). The worry is that these groups are unelected and yet effective. Indeed, in Seattle, they successfully shut down the global trade talks. Some extracted a deal from clothing importers to improve labor conditions for textile workers in Saipan in the Pacific. Others claimed credit for the fair trade coffee sold at Starbucks. And Oxfam was “all but co-opted” by firms and governments into designing debt-relief strategies (*The Economist*, 2000).

The Economist asked this question rhetorically, perhaps facetiously, assuming that “no one elected Oxfam” is both the answer to the question and the last word about Oxfam’s representative credentials.

Critics argue that these organizations lack the formal accountability mechanisms of re-election or removal from office but nevertheless serve as representatives of the poor, hungry, sick, under-educated, or otherwise marginalized constituencies, though they claim to represent many other interests as well. These critics conclude that, without elections, there is something deeply illegitimate with the representative status that NGOs claim for themselves. Critics note that NGOs “never have to face voters or bear any sort of accountability” (Rabkin, 1999: 37), that “NGOs are not elected, not accountable to any body politic” (Rivken and Casey, 2000/01: 37), and that “NGOs are not very often connected, in any direct way, to masses of ‘people’” (Anderson, 2000: 117).

I take *The Economist’s* question seriously and treat it as the introduction to a problem in democratic theory and practice having to do with actors who might credibly claim to be representatives, and perhaps even democratic ones, though not as a consequence of election to government or appointment by an elected office. I call these actors “self-appointed representatives.” Many individual and collective actors “self-appoint”: they claim to represent others, separate from electoral institutions or offices, and apart from state authority. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, represented African Americans subject to racial injustice. We might say that Dr. King was a self-appointed representative. Though encouraged by his congregation and activists to lead, he provided representation for people beyond these groups; an electoral constituency did not authorize him; and he was disconnected from state authority. Malcolm X, too, self-appointed as a representative of African Americans subject to racial injustice. A minister and national spokesman for the Nation of Islam (NOI), he was also a voice for others separate from the NOI who did not elect him. To take yet another well-known example, the musician Bono claims to represent the interests of Africans on the issues of AIDS, debt, and trade and co-founded an organization, ONE, that claims more than 7 million global members interested in taking action on these issues (ONE.org, 2016). Likewise, the National Organization for Women (NOW) is eager to bring about equality for all women and so arguably claims a representative status beyond its own members. But on what grounds does it represent all women?

For the most part, we do not understand what it means for groups and individuals to function as representatives apart from government and its offices, including electoral institutions. As demonstrated by the

preceding examples, the representative claims made on behalf of others can be varied, even conflicting. Without an election to register the choice between representatives and their claims, how are we to know who is a legitimate representative? Many assume that community-based actors are well equipped to represent others. Though they are not formally authorized or accountable, their proximity to the communities they represent, either in terms of residence or affinity characteristics such as race or gender (Dovi, 2002), may enable communication and accountability and may serve as grounds for legitimacy. Elsewhere, I have argued that community members may care less about a representative's affinity characteristics and more about whether the representative communicates with the community and produce outcomes for its benefit (Montanaro, 2012), and there is some empirical evidence to support this claim (Chung, Grogan, and Mosley, 2012). Bono's remoteness from the people he claims to represent, in terms not only of location but also of circumstance, or what has been called "social location" (Alcoff, 1991), raises skepticism about his claims and his intentions and also about the intentions of the decision-makers who meet with him. Is Bono's claim of representation paternalistic? Is he received as a representative because of his celebrity and charisma and so exercises influence on grounds arguably contrary to democratic norms and values? Yet if by representing others, he achieves a good on their behalf – by contributing to the G8's commitment to double the funding provided to African countries to fight poverty and disease – should that outweigh his distance or his intention? In short, we lack adequate theoretical frameworks for identifying what these actors do when they make representative claims and criteria for assessing the legitimacy of those claims. On what grounds should we judge this activity?

Generally speaking, democratic representation is clearly recognizable when based on free and fair elections. A free and uncorrupt vote is conventionally taken as establishing democratic representation and doing so in a way that is clear, identifiable, and effective in establishing relationships of authorization and accountability between representatives and their constituencies. By "free and fair," we mean many things, including that there is a contest in which participation is widespread that occurs in a context of political liberty (Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin, 1999). These conditions ensure that the selection of a representative is meaningful, indeed, legitimate. The constituency is also clear – the boundaries of districts, though they can be redrawn, are

known to us – and so we know who is responsible for selecting their representatives and who, precisely, is represented. It is far more difficult to determine the representative status and legitimacy of those who self-appoint, particularly if they speak for those beyond their own memberships.

For all its clarity, electoral representation can be a clumsy, ineffective, or even exclusive means of representation. With all of the choices a party offers in a platform and only one vote to convey information about them all, the vote is often considered a blunt instrument of choice and control, with little capacity to convey detailed information (Dunn, 1999: 338; Ferejohn, 1999: 137; Maravall, 1999). And winning coalitions are often quite exclusive. In a first-past-the-post system, the candidate with the most votes wins. If a party receives the most votes in each district, it will control 100 percent of the seats in parliament – “winner takes all,” so to speak. The advantages of such a system include stability and accountability (Blais, 1991; Blais and Massicotte, 1996). But aggregating votes in this way means that a winning coalition may not have won the most votes, leaving the majority of the population without representation of their choice (Amy, 1995; 1996). Seats are disproportionately assigned, with large parties receiving more seats than their share of the votes, and small parties fewer seats than their share of the votes (Ezrow, 2010). Some governments made efforts to address such deficits by employing proportional systems to include groups that were historically marginalized. But there are objections to proportional representation, including that it leads to a “balkanization” of the polity, ossifying the very social cleavages it intends to remedy (Lijphart, 1994; Phillips, 1995; Urbinati, 2000; Williams, 1998), and assumes that a group is able to organize and articulate its views in a manner consistent with the existing system (Young, 1990: Ch. 6).

With increasing complexities of issue, size, and pluralism of contemporary societies has come a proliferation of representative relationships, both within electoral arenas and also in non-electoral and informal domains, challenging elections as the sole source of legitimate representation. Examples include formal political representatives at the United Nations, the European Union (EU), and various treaty organizations, “hybrid” institutions – so-called because they involve civil society organizations alongside state actors in public policy formulation and implementation (Avritzer, 2006) – and less formal self-appointed representatives, which

can include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, and even celebrity activists.

Self-appointed representation is, in part, a response to the limitations of the typical nation-based territorial model of constituency in a global political system. Military, economic, and environmental issues outsize the boundaries of any one nation-state and affect individuals beyond a given border (Archibugi, Koenig-Archibugi, and Marchetti, 2012). Scale up, as in the case of the EU, and we are left with an entity that is arguably more effective than a single nation-state in dealing with economic issues – and yet less subject to voter influence (Kymlicka, 1999; Weiler, 1999: 329). Faced with a mismatch between its powers and the ability of citizens to exert control, the EU has been criticized for its “democratic deficit” (Magnette, 2003: 144). To buttress its democratic legitimacy, it has included self-appointed representatives, such as NGOs and civil society organizations, in formal state-like processes of decision-making and policy implementation (Saurugger, 2007: 385). The European Commission accepts self-appointed representatives in an effort to have more and varied input on a given proposal. But it does so without any guiding normative criteria about the organizations themselves. The Commission does not demand that these organizations “demonstrate their credentials for representing those whose interests they advocate” (Rose, 2013).

Self-appointed representatives also benefit democracy when they respond to disparities of political weight and efficacy, which may exist both within nations and between them. For example, NOW is a “significant and visible presence in Washington politics,” providing “an institutionalized voice to and compensatory representation for the concerns of formerly excluded groups that still have insufficient formal representation in national politics” (Strolovitch, 2007: 17). Such self-appointed representatives can advocate for constituencies affected by policies but without the political weight to influence decision-making, providing a *prima facie* case for their importance to the depth and breadth of democracy and representation.

Nevertheless, self-appointed representatives have an *ad hoc* nature, which leaves them open to questions about their status and, quite rightly, challenges to their legitimacy. Dr. King, the Muslim Council of Britain, the musician Bono, Jerry Falwell, the National Rifle Association, and Invisible Children all claim to speak for others and have varying degrees and quality of connection to their purported

constituencies. Though I will argue that self-appointed representatives have the potential to benefit democracy, I share *The Economist's* concern that they may not contribute substantively to democracy or may even undermine it. If self-appointed representatives speak for constituencies that are already well served by existing structures of power, they might undermine egalitarianism and inclusiveness – norms that are central to democracy. Indeed, we must view the relationship between those who self-appoint and those they claim to represent as representation or the duties and obligations of these actors might skew toward those who authorize them by their donations or investment and away from those they claim to represent. Without the normative obligations invoked by representation, those who self-appoint would otherwise be understood as primarily, even solely, accountable to their own members and shareholders or as organizations that should act in ways that will increase membership to please their boards and shareholders. It is precisely because self-appointed representatives often have all of these goals, and might want to pursue several at the same time, that we should understand them as representatives to emphasize both their obligations to their claimed constituencies and the affects they often have beyond those for whom they claim to speak. And, of course, not everyone is well represented formally – while some are over-represented, others are under-represented, misrepresented, or entirely overlooked. Self-appointed representatives, unbound by borders, offices, and institutions, can reach these people. Thus, there is a pressing need for theory, both empirical and normative, that will allow us to expand our understanding of representation beyond government and elections to include those who represent by self-appointment and to distinguish democratic from non-democratic self-appointed representation.

The questions I address in this book are: In the absence of a formal election or a government office, how do we identify as “representative” actors who self-appoint? And, in the absence of formal authorization and accountability normally established by the reward of re-election or the sanction of removal from office, how do we assess self-appointed representatives as “democratic”? Put differently, how might the concept and criteria of representation be brought to bear on the arena of self-appointed representation? If the functions and norms entailed in the notion of “democratic representation” can be achieved by self-appointed representation, we must theoretically identify the phenomenon – its nature and potentials – and then develop criteria of judgment.

Conceptual Strategy

Despite their non-elected, non-formal nature, and even despite the possibility that they may not pursue the interests of those they represent, actors who self-appoint are sometimes received as representatives by decision-makers. As Bono pointed out, the people for whom he claims to speak have not elected him, but still he meets with leaders of the G8 countries, encouraging them to cancel debt for some of the world's poorest countries. The World Bank included Oxfam in its multilateral debt relief discussions as a representative of the world's poor. And the International Monetary Fund consulted various NGOs, including Oxfam, when it reviewed the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. Representation occurs apart from government and electoral institutions when an actor claims to represent others (Saward, 2010) and "a relevant audience" recognizes the claim (Rehfeld, 2006: 1), even without reference to qualifications or legitimacy. The "audience" is a fluid concept capturing the relevant decision-makers that must recognize a claimant as a representative. In these examples, the representative claims made by Bono and Oxfam were offered to and recognized by the leaders of the G8 and the World Bank, respectively. If the audiences did not receive their claims – if the decision-makers did not receive them as representatives – then Bono and Oxfam would not represent others in these contexts. Note that we do not know who the relevant audience is until the claim of representation is made (Rehfeld, 2006; Saward, 2010). It is not until Bono targets the issue of debt relief that the leaders of the G8 countries are identified as the audience relevant to the issue or as the group of decision-makers germane to the claim. Though self-appointed actors are not elected and not appointed by a government, they nevertheless represent others to audiences that are, in part, invoked by the representative claim itself.

We must broaden our understanding of representation so that we can recognize it when it occurs beyond government institutions and develop criteria that enable us to assess it. To represent in a political arena is to render others politically present. That is, to make others perceptible and relevant for consideration in deliberation and decision-making. I use "render" to reveal the agency of the representative: to render can be to translate or express, to depict or portray, but also to make, cause to be, or become. These meanings suggest a spectrum of constitutiveness of our political interests and identity (Laclau, 2007).

At one end of the spectrum, the representative merely translates or expresses the interests of a constituency to an audience; at the other end of the spectrum, the representative constitutes the interests of a constituency. The forms or “shapes” (Saward, 2014) that the representative takes are many: a representative may act as delegate, advocate, or trustee. But the representative need not be formally elected or appointed to render others politically present to audiences. And this can be done well or poorly; representation can be done to democratic effect and in democratic ways or to undemocratic effect and in undemocratic ways.

Consider what it is to be represented: to have your interests made perceptible and relevant to an audience for consideration in deliberation and decision-making. Where a group and its interests were politically absent in the sense of being unknown to, or neglected by, audiences, a claim of representation now makes them perceptible within the divisions and boundaries of a given political arena (Rancière, 2004) – an arena that is intended to, or would in fact, affect the decisions of a state or a body with the formal capacity to make binding decisions and potentially follow these up with the legitimate monopoly on violence. In short, to be represented is to be rendered politically present to an audience – a state or body – that makes a decision about us that would help or harm.

The danger and potential of representation is its connection to our political ontology: it is one way that we gain a political identity in the eyes of decision-makers, and so the danger of misrepresentation looms large. Of course, being unrepresented can also be harmful. To be rendered politically present – to be represented – can mean that a group and its interests are properly considered in the decisions that affect them. If done poorly or not at all, it can mean that interests are misunderstood or neglected. When decision-making occurs that will affect a group whose interests are misunderstood, the marginalization of that group can be exacerbated. Citizens, therefore, must not passively receive claims about their political subjectivity or the political subjectivity of others; we must be active critics in assessing and approving or disapproving claims. An election, even with its clear authorization by its constituents, does not fully mitigate the possibility of misrepresentation, though it can provide a clear signal of approval or disapproval and establishes a relationship of accountability.

To assess self-appointed representation, I borrow the basic concepts and criteria employed in electoral theories of representative

democracy – such as constituency, authorization, and accountability – and ask what these concepts might mean in the context of those who represent by self-appointment. I use the criteria familiar to us in elected representation to help determine whether, and if so how, such features can be cast off from their electoral institutional forms to operate otherwise in structurally different modes of political representation. As part of this project, I argue that there are often non-electoral mechanisms of constituency formation, authorization, and accountability at work that, though not based on formal electoral institutions, may contribute to the democratic, or otherwise legitimate, representative credentials of those who self-appoint. Because these actors claim to represent others and because decision-makers receive these actors as representatives of others, they can and should be held to account, though, in recognition of their differing powers and functions, we must stretch our imaginations beyond the standard normative framework of elections to do so.

I develop this argument by outlining the concept of self-appointed representation, including its potential powers and functions, as well as non-electoral mechanisms of authorization and accountability that are appropriate to those powers and functions. These actors operate primarily within civil society and the public sphere and lack the coercive powers of state actors, such as legislators. The capacities of such self-appointed representatives to affect people work primarily through publicity, advocacy, and persuasion. Of course, some self-appointed representatives might affect others insofar as advocacy and persuasion on behalf of one group might harm another.

In my terms, an actor, whether person or organization, creates two distinct positions or constituencies in relation to a self-appointed claim of representation: the constituency that the actor claims to represent, and so renders politically present – the claimed constituency – and the constituency empowered to authorize the self-appointed representative and demand accountability – the authorizing constituency. Distinguishing between these positions illustrates that some representatives render a constituency politically present and empower the constituency such that they are authorized by and held accountable to it, whereas others render a constituency politically present that does not authorize it and to which it is not accountable. Bono appoints himself a representative of Africans suffering from poverty and disease (his claimed constituency), and he builds an organization around

his mission to which he looks for authorization. His authorizing constituency is composed of more than 7 million people who are members of his organization, ONE (2016). If the authorizing constituency is not largely composed of those Bono claims to represent, then we can raise questions about the paternalistic nature of this representative relationship. Even if the claimed and authorizing constituencies are incongruent, we might argue that Bono is interested in achieving a good on their behalf – say, increasing funding to fight poverty and disease – with the caution that the people who authorize his activities and demand accountability from him may not be his claimed constituency.

Following this conceptual strategy, I argue that these two features of representation – rendering a constituency politically present and authorization by it – are a first step in assessing the credentials of a representative, even one who self-appoints. Is the self-appointed representative authorized by and held accountable to its claimed constituency? Or does the self-appointed representative claim to represent one constituency while receiving authorization from a distinct constituency? In other words, is there congruence between its claimed and authorizing constituencies? Or are donors, for example, authorizing a representative because they are a sympathetic proxy for the claimed constituency? Under those circumstances, the self-appointed representative may still achieve a good for the claimed constituency but not in a manner that is recognizably democratic.

Our assessment of self-appointed representation should further consider the effects of representation on the claimed constituency as well as on others. More precisely, we should evaluate self-appointed representatives with respect to not only whether they are authorized by those they render politically present but also whether they have democratic effects and outcomes. The first is important because we should not ignore the power relations that underpin representative relationships. If a self-appointed representative renders a constituency politically present to audiences of decision-makers but without empowering that constituency to express its approval or disapproval and demand accountability, we need to be especially cautious in assessing the effects and consequences of such representation. The second is important because, conversely, a claimed constituency might still benefit from self-appointed representation even if it does not, perhaps cannot, exercise authorization.

Considering the effects of representation situates the contributions of self-appointed representation in a broader democratic system. It may