



# Bringing the Global Political Economy Back In: Neoliberalism, Globalization, and Democratic Consolidation<sup>1</sup>

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How do we consolidate developing democratic regimes in the Global South so that the life expectancies of these regimes are considerably sustainable? What have been the key epistemological and normative shortcomings of the mainstream scholarship of democratization? How can we overcome these limitations? Is it necessary to consider the global political economy as a fertile source for deducing some explanatory variables that will help us understand the sources of democratic instability at the national-domestic spheres of political governance? In view of these questions, I contend that there are fundamental limitations in the mainstream scholarship on democratization that we have to overcome. In this essay, I critically appraise the nature of the democratization debate by positing that existing material inequities and injustices in new electoral democracies in the developing world are *constitutive of global hegemonic interests* that function as the critical determinants of democratic stability. Second, I propose some corrective suggestions that will perhaps inspire a new research agenda about democratization that should overcome the limitations of the current mainstream social science scholarship on democratization. Finally, I articulate some concluding substantive remarks on why we need to bring the global political economy back into our scholarly analyses of democratic consolidation.

**Keywords:** globalization, democratic consolidation, critical theory, political economy, neoliberalism

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One of the biggest puzzles in the study of international politics today is this: given the seemingly unstoppable global appetite for democratization as evidenced by the “third-wave democracies” and the current cluster of struggles dubbed as the “Arab Spring,” *how do we best consolidate these newly institutionalized democratic regimes so that their life expectancies are considerably sustainable?* This question is not new; indeed, the past few decades have seen quite a surge of literature investigating

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various aspects of and questions about “democratic consolidation” (Linz and Stepan 1996; Mainwaring 1989, 1992; Beetham 1994; Diamond 1994; Schneider 1995; Schedler 1997, 1998a, 2001; Gasiorowski and Power 1998; Alexander 2001, 2002; Lindberg 2001; Salman 2007; Ufen 2008; Ulfelder 2010). Nonetheless, there are fundamental limitations that most of the theoretically and empirically oriented scholarly works have failed to explicitly recognize and one of the main goals of this essay is to recast the current state of the literature in a corrective light. In other words, I am concerned with several key points of inquiry: What have been the key epistemological and normative shortcomings of mainstream scholarship of democratization? How can we overcome these shortcomings? Is it necessary to consider the *global political economy* as a fertile source for deducing some explanatory variables that will help us understand the sources of democratic instability at the national-domestic spheres of political governance?

My tasks here are threefold. First, I critically appraise the nature of the democratization debate by positing that existing material inequities and injustices in new electoral democracies in the developing world are *constitutive of global hegemonic interests* which are critical determinants in the stability of any newly established democratic regimes. As a result thereof, I contend that a global-transnational political-economic perspective does matter in our scholarly search for a meaningful understanding of domestic political change. This means that a firm conception of interdependent global, national, and local political economies is indeed necessary in positing a more holistic understanding of authentic democratization in the developing world. Second, upon critical examination of the existing scholarship, I propose some quintessential theoretically and empirically oriented suggestions on how to move forward from the limitations of current scholarship and thereby will provide us a more comprehensive picture of the political dynamics of strengthening new democracies. In so doing, I offer some empirical-theoretical suggestions that address the limitations of the current mainstream social science scholarship on democratization. It takes into account the analytical parochialism of *methodological nationalism*, the severe limitations of a *historical-institutionalist* approach, a lack of clear and explicit normative empathy toward social justice and emancipation, and its willful blindness in the role of hegemonic norms in constituting material political realities. Third, I articulate some concluding substantive remarks on why we need to bring the global political economy back in the scholarly analyses of democratic consolidation.

Notwithstanding the objectives and the analytical tasks undertaken in this paper, let me emphasize that it is not the goal of this essay to provide a coherent analytical approach that seeks to debunk the current frameworks that are dominant in the literature today. Instead, the corrective suggestions that I propose here should inspire future critical scholarship on democratic consolidation to develop empirically informed and theoretically guided studies on various pathways in fostering the consolidation of democracies. Having said that, I commence the analysis in the following section by discussing the rudiments of the mainstream scholarship and highlight some of their fundamental limitations.

### **The Nature of Democratic Consolidation and the Failures of the Mainstream Scholarship**

Existing literature on democratic consolidation (Schedler 1998b) is quite substantial, yet it appears that this research program has been deadlocked.<sup>2</sup> For

<sup>2</sup>In December 2011 in Berlin, I had a meeting with Andreas Schedler, a world-leading scholar on democratization. He hinted that instead of studying democratic consolidation in toto, one should focus instead on particular aspects of the regime in question and see their causal power in impacting regime stability. Accordingly, it appears that the thrust of research on democratic consolidation has somewhat stalled.

instance, some scholars emphasize the procedural and formalistic elements of democracies by referring to the electoral processes as its most important feature (Dahl 1971; Abdulai and Crawford 2010). Another view of a consolidated democracy, meanwhile, includes three distinctive yet crucial features, namely the behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional aspects of political actors toward the regime (Abdulai and Crawford 2010; Linz and Stepan 1996). These, however, are inadequate in explaining the role of *exogenous* variables in the consolidation of democracies. To illustrate this, Diamond (1999), one of the most prominent American scholars in democratization, argues that the political institutionalization *within a regime*, and not civil society, is the “most important and urgent factor” in democratic consolidation. He was obviously referring to intra-national behavioral, attitudinal, and institutional factors that matter in regime consolidation. Likewise, this also goes for other research endeavors forming the landmark scholarship in democratization such as that which concerns the following: the functioning of political institutions (Huntington 1993; Grzymała-Busse 2007), respect for the democratic “rules of the game” (Diamond 1999; Levitsky and Way 2002) as well as popular and elite attitudes toward democracy (Putnam 1993; Almond and Verba 1963; O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Bermeo 2003; Cleary and Stokes 2006; Bernhard and Karakoc 2007).

These characterizations refer to what I call the “*substantive-endogenous*”<sup>3</sup> view of democratic consolidation, alluding to a set of functionalist-institutionalist, behavioral, and characteristic features of an “exemplary” democracy, and from thereon evaluating any given polity on how far it approaches such benchmarks. It is also reflected by an overt emphasis on the governance quality of state institutions (Huntington 1993), and the elites’ and general public’s democratic outlook (Bermeo 2003; Cleary and Stokes 2006; Bernhard and Karakoc 2007).

Notwithstanding, these views only acknowledge the institutional and mechanical elements of a supposedly well-functioning democracy. One must transcend the formalistic standards of democracy such as electoral processes and constitutional rule of law, and therefore, one should also consider other substantive aspects such as socioeconomic development and wealth distribution across the society as indispensable elements of a more sustainable and meaningful democratic polity (Lipset 1959; Przeworski 1991, 2000, 2005). There is indeed a need to go beyond the formal institutional democratization by also considering “*societal democratization*” as an essential yardstick in constituting democratic consolidation (Grugel 1999; Uhlin 2002).

In other words, I propose a conceptualization of *consolidation* as a *dynamic, multi-faceted, and transnational* process of regime endurance that can be attained through a more *equitable social and economic development*, serving as infrastructural support in enhancing the prospects of democratic persistence.<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, this shift of emphasis is due to the notion that consolidation of electoral democratic government’s rule may be severely hampered by serious political, economic, and social constraints (O’Donnell 1992). Demonstrative of this claim would be the examples of new electoral democracies such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, or even Ukraine, where sharp material inequalities function as hindrances in strengthening the prospects of consolidation. Indeed, one has to uphold the empirically grounded view that low levels of economic development and growth induce political instability, as shown by the strong propensity for newly democratized societies to disintegrate — a situation that indeed makes democracy less enduring (Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Maeda 2010; Teorell

<sup>3</sup>Svolik (2009:1) calls this set of definitions the “substantive” view, which refers to the “set of ideal outcomes that we should observe in a mature democracy.” I call it “endogenous” because the empirical focus is on intra-national domestic variables that focus on domestic political change.

<sup>4</sup>See page 95 in Schedler (1998a), specifically.

2010). Moreover, low levels of development coupled with sharp wealth inequalities within societies breed insecurity among the citizenry, which thereby fuels instability in the long run — and if left unmanaged, will lead to unstable revolutionary changes. One may only need to look at the example of toppling of the authoritarian regime of Mubarak in Egypt recently, yet the installation of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood President Morsi as the new leader somehow did not stop widespread protests showing the fundamental instabilities in the Egyptian society.

Equally important to emphasize is that the “*substantive-endogenous*” view, implying that democratization is a linear path of development, is quaint, and utterly misguided. The path toward democratic stability is a long and winding road, and we can only approach it by establishing social safety nets that make democratic societies more meaningful and sustainable for the broader citizenry.

The current penchant for democratization among countries must be juxtaposed with a more expansive purview of neoliberalism: unquestioned confidence in the free markets, formidable faith on the power of capital, and unwavering belief in a minimalist state (Brown 2006). This perspective has successfully permeated the capillaries of institutional power of many nation-states in the Global South. This being the case, there seems to be a happy marriage between neoliberal market ideology and the liberal democratic political praxis, making a triumphalist dominance of a political-economic faith that true human freedom can be achieved only through free markets and a “small” state. Not only does the *multiscalar hegemony* of neoliberalism become problematic, but the participating state is also marred by contradictions. Thus, Leys (2002) contends that the contradiction lies between the “economic power of capital” and the “political power of voters,” and that the worst conundrum occurs when the struggling neoliberal democratic state privileges the former, while utterly disregarding the latter.

This contradiction implies that the happy union between neoliberal markets and liberal democracy may be nearing a divorce. Such marriage is not based on parity, but a matter of domination of capitalism over the state, in which the latter is supposedly expected to be the custodian of public interests, yet it is now largely overtaken by the operational logic of capital and free markets. Jason Myers<sup>5</sup> crystallizes this argument by saying that “any government elected to power in a society with a largely capitalist economy will become dependent upon capitalism for its own survival.” We have yet to know the eventual and conclusive outcome of such marriage. Nevertheless, the current capitalist crises in much of the Western liberal democratic world lead us to formulate several corollary suppositions. First, the invisible hand of capitalism brought a different sort of empowerment. It empowered a select few who operate under the ruthless logic of the capitalist mode of production, consequently leading to trans-generational socioeconomic injustices. Second, it remains a critical issue whether or not such ideological contradictions significantly undermine the stability and life expectancy of current democratic regimes — that is, democratic consolidation.

Having explained the problems in the scholarship on democratic consolidation and the ideological contradictions of neoliberalism, I shall proceed in the next section by reinforcing my argument that the contradictions of the capitalist global political economy significantly matter in the consolidation of democratic regimes in the Global South.

### Democratic Consolidation and the Global Political Economy

The main concern here is to show how global economic neoliberalism is a *structural* and *constitutive* element of the political dynamics of struggling democratic

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<sup>5</sup>Myers, 2010, pp. 101.

regimes in the Global South, resulting thereby in an elusive quest to make such regimes stable. By structural, I mean that the macro-sociological structures of most developing democracies in the Global South are now predominantly governed by neoliberal ideology. By constitutive, I mean that the political survival (and perhaps even the ontogenesis) of many of these developing democracies in the neoliberalism-led global political economy depends upon the full or conditional embrace of neoliberalism as preached and promulgated by the neoliberal Western core. Notably, the rhetorical power and historical emergence of neoliberalism, magnified through the current scale of economic globalization, reached its peak with the revival of the US economy in the 1990s vis-à-vis the emergence of international agencies that reinforced the neoliberal agenda.<sup>6</sup>

That being so, the broad spectrum of the social sciences has recently launched some notable research endeavors covering the impact of neoliberal globalization on the life expectancy of new democracies. Insightful of the neoliberal perspective, today's version of economic globalization has allegedly provided immense socio-economic benefits to countries that have vigorously adopted policies adhering to the neoliberal paradigm. These benefits include a lot of things, most notable of which was the strengthened political and economic freedoms, thereby promoting democratization.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the socioeconomic liabilities of globalization are also undeniable, but it has been believed that these can be managed through what many neoliberal defenders call "globalization from below" (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse and Sikkink 1999). This approach includes actors at the grassroots level who closely collaborate with each other to further their advocacies and interests in managing such global process in the name of justice, thereby making globalization's ills somehow curable using the tools made by globalization itself (Wolf 2004; Bhagwati 2004). This speaks highly of the popular "wisdom" that neoliberal economic globalization and democratization are complementary elements that strongly bolster each other.

Taking into account such controversy, I contend that neoliberal economic globalization seriously undercuts the life expectancy of new democracies, particularly in draining national governance systems' capacities to promote equitable socioeconomic development that remains the pivotal feature of many of today's most stable democracies (Cerny 1999; Farazmand 1999; Putzel 2005). Democracy may now be negatively seen as a sheer imposition of "procedural norms" of neoliberal global order over imperialized peoples (Ayers 2009). In this regard, utilizing a rigorous quantitative large-N study of 127 countries, even positivist political scientists Li and Reuveny (Reuveny and Li 2003; Li and Reuveny 2009; Regilme 2012a) remarked that trade openness and portfolio investment inflows—as proxy variables for neoliberal economic globalization—have an extremely damaging effect on the quality and persistence of democracy. This means that new democratic states have to be more cautious and prudent in opening their markets to the global economy by strengthening their institutional capabilities and establishing adequate social safety nets (Li and Reuveny 2009).

Even so, we need a deeper analysis of the overall trans-national dynamic of power relations in the global realm of the material economic resources and its distribution. It should thus come as no surprise that the free market, purportedly governed by the infamous "invisible hand," is not "free" at all from the imperfections of human decisions and greedy human interests. Like any other realm of social life, it is subject to oppressive power relations across the global-national-local nexus. Although weak nation-states in the Global South may be more vulnerable to global political-economic relations, powerful states in the West have been consistently active—if not unprecedentedly powerful—in

<sup>6</sup>Gamble, "Neoliberalism," pp. 133, specifically.

<sup>7</sup>For a comprehensive literature review, see Reuveny and Li (2003).

shaping the international system within the purview of their material economic interests (Helleiner 1994). To put it bluntly, the increasing extent of economic globalization has also been concurrently shaped by the active direction of the economic hegemons in the Western world (Drezner 2007). To cap it off, Woods (2006:345) argues that, whereas the key challenges of globalization are immense, strong states are able to influence and shape the global order, while weak ones are helplessly trying to cope with the system.

As neoliberal globalization's ultimate organizing principle is the limitless accumulation of *capital*, the definitive dynamic of socioeconomic inequities has never been more transnational than now. In the words of Hirsch and Kannankulam (2011:12), "offensive capital has become more international," and *one of the capital offenses of capital itself is prioritizing further capital accumulation over the emancipatory interest of the marginalized*. The "natural law" of neoliberal globalization considers capital accumulation as a sacrosanct principle fully embraced by powerful global capitalists whose allegiance is to their own selfish interests recognizing no other universal norm of collective human welfare except that of only oneself. Together with its national and local political allies, global capitalists have been able to accumulate capital unceasingly, uncontrollably, and cunningly—at the expense of the authentic freedoms of their fellow human beings.

Right at the very heart of this impasse is the powerful theoretical purchase of what I call the "*cautionary view*." At the very least, we should be more reasonably doubtful upon the virtue of global neoliberal markets vis-à-vis a lean state in being able to unleash the full, liberating potential of the human person as a *political citizen*—that is, the authentic *homo politicus*. Extreme socioeconomic inequities, when left unaddressed, will function as the *point of disequilibrium* for new democratic regimes to eventually disintegrate. The power of capital, cushioned by the preeminence of private property rights over economic and social rights of the disempowered, is the determinative factor in the political *instability* of all new democratic regimes. This is because, as Myers<sup>8</sup> puts it, the "power of private property creates vast zones in which the abstract equality of citizens is effectively meaningless." That is to say, the apparent profundity and rhetorical catch of the right to private property is foundationally based on the nihilization, nullification, and degradation of the very core of authentic human freedom. After all, "positive freedom is the precondition of meaningful negative freedom"<sup>9</sup>—an insightful axiomatic principle that underscores the authenticity of the political autonomy and freedom of the human person (positive freedom) that is contingent upon the absence of external hindrances toward the very attainment of such autonomy (negative freedom). Thus, socioeconomic inequities undermine the very positive freedom to which everybody, of all political ideological persuasions, certainly aspires.

The ultimate worth of chasing neoliberal global capitalism and its vigorous human agents, as the ultimate global offenders, is its persistent praxeological disregard for issues that deal with, as Darrel Moellendorf (2009) calls it, "distributive egalitarianism." Notably, both Rawls<sup>10</sup> and Nagel (2005) seem to think that global justice is a matter only of the nation-state's affairs. In contrast, Moellendorf emphasizes the need to look into the current global institutional arrangements, and how they consequently perpetuate and constitute vicious cycles of material injustices. In this spirit, respect for *human dignity* must be the ultimate philosophical justification for all issues of distribution, and as Moellendorf maintains, it has "distributive implications for the global economy."<sup>11</sup> Taking a cautionary stance

<sup>8</sup>Myers, 2010, pp. 98.

<sup>9</sup>See Myers, 2010, pp. 46.

<sup>10</sup>Rawls, *Law of Peoples*; Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*.

<sup>11</sup>See Moellendorf, 2009, pp. 1125.

against neoliberal globalization that promotes severe material inequities, fostering distributive justice must be done not only for the mere *instrumental* reason of promoting regime stability. More importantly, it must be defended for the *deontological* value of *human dignity* in a world where extreme global poverty in the Global South and North alike ironically exists with a select few powerful global capitalists ruthlessly taking advantage of the labor of the powerless herd of billions.

Moreover, neoliberal economic globalization is beset with a *trilemma* paradox, according to Dani Rodrik (2011). Accordingly, it is impossible, let alone intolerable, to *concomitantly* pursue democracy, national self-determination, and economic globalization. Too much power vested to governments, correspondingly, leads to the disastrous effects of protectionism; too much freedom consigned to the markets, meanwhile, tethers to the chain of perils of a highly unstable global economy, leaving the defenseless with marginal socio-political welfare from the states themselves. Notwithstanding, unfettered economic globalization triggers extremely challenging risks to humanity's welfare through uncontrolled competition vis-à-vis continuous marginalization (Giddens 1990). These risks are very evident since the 2007 financial crisis, resulting not only in severe anxiety among those in the stock exchange, but also triggering the emergence of the riots and protests in major cities in the Global North, most recently in London, let alone in the Global South, such as that in the Horn of Africa. Consequently, Gamble (2010:3) warns us of the disastrous "political consequences of the crash," astute of the "unbalanced character of growth" and "highly uneven growth, depending on the position of particular states in the international economy." Skidelsky (2009:69), likewise, warns that "unequal income distribution" may worsen from its current levels due to the crisis. All of these are indeed insightful of the failure of Western capitalism to sustain its vitality, which had its heyday especially in the 1980s and 1990s when "Washington Consensus" was still a hegemonically fabricated *common sense* among the powerful and the subverted alike.

By the same token, Skidelsky (2009:113–128) sharply differentiates two periods in the global political economy based on the dominant paradigm at that time, particularly between "Keynesian" Bretton Woods (1951–1973) and the "New Classical" Washington Consensus (1980s onwards). The former advocates strong institutional and state support to maintain stability, while the latter heralds a formidable faith in self-regulating markets. Skidelsky (2009:116), in this regard, analyzes the latter paradigm and its impact on global gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate in real terms:

The growth rate during the Bretton Woods years was on average higher than during the Washington Consensus period — at 4.8% as compared to the 3.2% growth rate after 1980...A 1.6 percentage point difference might not seem very big. However, had the world economy grown at 4.8% rather than at 3.2% from 1980 until today, it would have been more than 50% larger, something we shall achieve only in 2022 with the 1980–2009 average rate.

Indeed, not only does neoliberalism ultimately lead to a significant decrease in global economic productivity and income volume, but it also promotes macro-economic volatility that severely undermines economic growth especially in the developing world (Hnatkovska and Loayza 2004; Skidelsky 2009:120). But the problem is not only with economic growth; instead, it is also about how the fruits of such growth may be distributed across the society that both serves collective and individual welfare. Expectedly, income inequality has significantly widened during the "Washington Consensus" period. The rapid growth of inequality is directly proportional to the ascendancy to hegemonic status of the Washington Consensus as a haphazard policy paradigm. Moreover, Skidelsky (2009:123) rightly argues that "large discrepancies in wealth have produced political instabil-

ity,” such that promising emerging economies such as Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa have yet to adequately consolidate their democratic rule.

The situation is further complicated when neoliberal globalization aggravates the already existing structural problems persistent in many electoral democracies whose long and bloody historical past with Western colonization created pervasive socioeconomic inequalities. For instance, in the case of the only three electoral democracies in Southeast Asia, the top 10 most affluent families based on a 1996 data dominantly control their country’s total market capitalization (Claessens, Djankov, and Lang 2000; Regilme 2013). Notably, the figures are as follows: Indonesia with 57.7% of its national market capitalization controlled by these top 10 most affluent families, Philippines with 52.5%, and Thailand with 46.2%. These figures are telling: as long as new electoral democratic polities remain mired with deep material inequalities, they will always be sucked into a whirlpool of crises, instabilities, low-intensity conflicts, political busts, and many other intermittent macro-disturbances that will undermine the consolidation initiatives of the state-society nexus. This reminds us of Ernest Mandel’s (1962:686) allusion to the powerful argument of Marx and Engels: “the realm of freedom begins where necessity ends.” This may sound trite, but still very insightful: true democracy begins when hunger and material insecurities are no longer a human individual’s problem, let alone that of the societies.

Hence, this is where the rubber meets the road: the only way to cure the *sick* or *dying* new democracies is by courageously addressing issues of socioeconomic injustices in as much as this is the only way to deliver them into *redivivus*, or more precisely, democratic consolidation. These democracies may be *sick* but not *terminally sick*, so to speak; there is (a) cure to all of these. While its sickness has deep causes, one step forward in finding the cure is by starting at the neoliberal-led global political economy which creates problematic distributions of material economic growth that threatens the stability of electoral democratic regimes.

In this section, I articulated an empirically informed and conceptually grounded justification that the neoliberal global political economy is constitutive of the life expectancy of new national democratic regimes. In the next part, I present a re-examination of the unbearable inadequacies of mainstream democratization scholarship.

### Discontent in the Mainstream Democratization Scholarship

What have been the fundamental limitations of mainstream democratization scholarship? Do these limitations warrant a need for a new “organizing perspective” (Rhodes 1997:4, 16) in analyzing the politics of democratic consolidation, and more broadly, democratization? In this regard, I shall broadly present the key features of the mainstream scholarship and consequently introduce some quintessential features of an alternative “organizing perspective” that shall be a step forward in the democratization scholarship. Thus, I first outline a litany of discontents in the current mainstream discourse of democratization: the *analytical ontology* of liberalism and the nation-state in a global political economy; the *methodology* of applied historical-institutionalist approach to democratization; and the *normativity* of excessive individualism and neoliberal global hegemony devoid of justice.

The *ontology of mainstream democratization studies*, mostly done by scholars of comparative politics and international relations, revolves around the central theme of individual (neo) liberalism. Freedom is framed within the purview of free markets thereby empowering the economic individual. This is also seen in the realm of public politics coupled with a thin state, with a bestowed duty of making the best possible environment for the supposedly self-regulating, rationally calculating market. Achieving its triumphant days in the 1980s onward, neoliberal capitalist democracy—as the “new dominant common sense, the



paradigm shaping all policies"<sup>12</sup>—has been the democratic model that is vigorously upheld by the West, most especially in the United States. An example of this is that of Larry Diamond's (2008) notion of democracy which must be couched in "good governance, transparency, individual rights, and economic prosperity," among others. These buzzwords invoke a certain democratic view that is hoped by neoliberals to be inherently sustainable. But the short history of neoliberalism has shown that its democratic model is, in fact, ontologically embedded in a cycle of boom and busts, thus implying that they are not persistently stable. The central point of Diamond's version of "democratic virtues" is insightful of a faith in free markets and individualistic rights that epistemologically dismisses the more substantive issues of economic growth that is just, sustainable, and equitable. Much earlier than this, most ontological perspectives about the very core of democracy center around the procedural, and highly mechanical view of elections, mere political rights, and strong institutions—but never have they been so explicit, let alone determined, in tackling socioeconomic equity as a key priority in sustaining democratic regimes (Dahl 1971; Putnam 1993; Downs 1957; Huntington 1965, 1984, 1991; Karl 1990; Zakaria 1997, 2007; Carothers 1999; Diamond 1999; Lijphart 1999; Andeweg 2000). Where are the fundamental economic and social rights of billions of people mired in poverty? Are political rights without state's active commitment toward vigorously promoting economic welfare enough? A kind of democracy that merely promises political rights and unconditional guarantees of capital accumulation (for the select powerful few) is just bound to fail. Democracy that is unconditionally governed solely by the promise of political rights is unsustainable. Hence, public policies that promote socio-economic justice must be considered as indispensable in a consolidated democracy.

In addition, the tone of the hegemonic US comparative politics scholarship has been overtly fixated with endogenous variables within the nation-state—thereby leading to a narrow analytical and methodological focus. It is exhibitiv of the mainstream discourses' fixation with *methodological nationalism*, with its view of the "nation-state" as the definitive unit of analysis in analyzing social and political phenomena (Chernilo 2006; Therborn 2000; Wimmer and Schiller 2002; Beck 2000, 2002; Zürn 2005). Most of the studies on democratic transitions and quality of democratization thereafter have been done by country specialists (Fukuyama 1997) and thus have resulted to a very obsessive focus on the internal political forces while being silent on the extra-national dynamics. It was only in the last fifteen years<sup>13</sup> or so that the extra-national dynamics have been seen as *quite* crucial in the entire analytical equation (Whitehead 1996; Hafner-Burton 2005; Carroll 2010; Hyde 2011). Notwithstanding, there is a notable dearth of appreciation of viewing democratic consolidation as a functional derivative of the global-national nexus. Viewed as a liability in the goal of achieving a holistic analysis, methodological nationalism in the study of democracy is like having a tunnel vision in analyzing a problem amidst the vast menagerie of extra-national variables that have to be taken into account.

Third, the seemingly uncontested and dominant analytical approach in democratization studies also deserves much skepticism. In this regard, I am referring to the *pervasive methodological use of the historical institutionalist approach* (Thelen and Steinmo 1992; Thelen 2004; Czada 2006; Steinmo 2008) [HI] in

<sup>12</sup>Gamble, "Neoliberalism," pp. 129.

<sup>13</sup>One of most notable works that fundamentally rejects the mainstream democratization studies is that of William Robinson's *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony*. See also Robinson (1996a, 1996b). Positing the transnational dimensions of domestic political change, it argues that US foreign policy shift toward democracy promotion in the Global South marks a goal to preserve undemocratic elite control of societies. Despite this convincing work, democratization scholars are arguably still unable to appreciate the international dimensions of political change.

studying social and political change. This approach highlights “institutions” as explanatory variables for the social, political, and economic changes across a temporal scale. HI’s seemingly unquestioned currency may be gleaned, albeit in varying degrees, in the most influential and highly cited works in democratization: on the institutional foundations of democracy vis-à-vis the rule of law (Weingast 1997);<sup>14</sup> on presidential democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996), on party systems and constitutional frameworks (Stepan and Skach 1993; Mainwaring 1999); on the European welfare state (Baldwin 1992), among many others (Rothstein 2001; Brownlee 2007). Referring to its inadequacies in explaining the variable of change, HI accentuates both the institutional *structures’* inherent inertia for change (“stickiness”) and its colossal causal power to exact political change compared with that of the *agents*. It falls short of taking into account the indispensable role played by agents of change who act within the broader remit of structurally embedded institutions (Schmidt 2000, 2008; Campbell and Pedersen 2001; Hay 2001).<sup>15</sup>

Thus, there are two key problems with applied HI in democratization studies. First, it has a strong propensity for determinism in explaining socio-political change. This is exemplified, for instance, by its strong reference to “lock-in,” “critical junctures,” and “path dependence” of previous national institutional decisions and outcomes—seemingly immortalizing a causal sequence of events that appear to be change-resistant (Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2008). Democratization must be conceived neither in terms of a deterministic teleology nor a linear developmental process, but a dynamic process that is multi-scalar in its scope. Second, in reference to ontology, HI is largely based on its imprecise and unbalanced view of the structure-agency issue, with HI’s socio-political agency as being apparently and solely determined by the path-dependent and historically embedded institutions as structures (Hay and Wincott 1998). But any reasonable “social science,” for that matter, will always strive for a balanced view of structures vis-à-vis agency in analyzing any given phenomenon.

Moving on, the *third pillar of the trilogy of discontents in the scholarship is on democracy’s normative aspect*—particularly on the higher-order question of interests that are at play in promoting authentic human freedoms in a given society. The general tone in mainstream scholarship, particularly among comparativists, is tintured with an analytical bias toward prioritizing *minimalist* freedoms (suffrage, civil liberties, private property, etc.). It appears that the ultimate normative aim of neoliberal capitalist democracy is the full empowerment of the *homo economicus* whose lifeblood depends on *capital*. Freedom is subsumed by the language-game of “capital” whose very existence depends on the oppressive social relations between laborers and capitalists themselves. But freedom, as preached by the neoliberals, is always deemed to be ontologically and normatively possessed, albeit exclusively, by the human individual—and guaranteed by the minimalist state. All of these suppositions may be deemed reasonable, but the problem lies somewhere else. When the *homo economicus* gains so much market freedom, these liberties accumulate too much political power trans-generationally, thereby creating *unjust comparative advantages*, and thus motivate other human individuals to benefit unjustly from the fruits of their generational past. This, unfortunately, occurs most especially in postcolonial peripheral societies, which are also struggling democracies, and whose political economies’ rules of the game are dictated by the seemingly undefeatable transnational capitalist overlords located at the core<sup>16</sup> as

<sup>14</sup>This is more of a work of rational choice institutionalism as it uses a game-theoretic approach to political behavior.

<sup>15</sup>See also the pioneering works about this topic in the field of international political sociology: Robinson (1996a, 1996b).

<sup>16</sup>See the pioneering work of van der Pijl (1998, 2007, 2010) on transnational elites.

supported by neoliberal global capitalist structures and its agents. This being the case, a truly democratic state must be able to effectively rectify the failures of the market and thereby *empower* the *disempowered* individuals who find themselves amidst extremely minimal initial endowments that are absolutely inadequate for them to compete in the so-called market. It is only then that the *homo economicus* becomes a *homo politicus*. The duty of the authentic democratic state is to ensure that all human individuals are truly free in exercising their ontological personas *both as economic and political free persons*.

After articulating my own litany of discontents against the mainstream democratization scholarship, I present in the next part some tentative elements of a proposed new agenda in the democratization scholarship.

### Toward a New Agenda in Democratization Scholarship?

Previously, I laid out a litany of discontents in the mainstream democratization scholarship and contended that the scholarship's trajectory must be able to transcend the severe limitations posed by the "trilogy of discontents." Although not as determinative a proposal as I wish it could be, the need for a "new organizing perspective" on democratic consolidation is indeed necessary. Thus, I introduce some key features of an alternative organizing perspective in undertaking "democratization scholarship."

First, the ontological focus should be primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, on the full emancipation of the human individual. Interestingly, neoliberals also had such promise—the emancipation of an individual. What is absolutely missing in their promise is how emancipation of the individual constitutes the need to rectify injustices in the macro-society. Indeed, an open-ended debate on what is the deeper normative purpose of "democratization" should be re-considered. The tone of scholarship should not be purely mechanical and institutionally oriented, while most of these macro-sociological and macro-political questions require a solid and systematic understanding of how processes actually work in the real and harsh transnational macro-politics of social justice. Notwithstanding, I argue that research problems in the democratization research agenda should be undertaken within the full panoply of *Sozialwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* and must be casted toward the final cause of human emancipation. In this regard, Wyn Jones<sup>17</sup> aptly asks the following points:

To orientate theorizing toward emancipation is, necessarily, to raise a series of difficult and intractable questions concerning audiences and agency. The question is not just, after Wendt, What is international relations for? But also, Who is it for?

The question of the addressee is a crucial one. It reminds us of the question on what kind of democracy paradigm we need to espouse in order to shape the kind of democratic institutions that will last the test of time, and more importantly, the one that will be the ultimate force in bolstering peace and stability within a society. This fully acknowledges how democratic consolidation can only occur when equitability and justice-related issues are rightfully addressed, as both quantitative and qualitative mainstream political science is now beginning to recognize.<sup>18</sup> As a *new and emancipatory agenda* in democratization scholarship takes critical theory as its primary source of normative inspiration, it aims to consider the unique theoretical amalgam of Gramscian and Horkheimerian (Horkheimer

<sup>17</sup>Wyn Jones, *Critical Theory and World Politics*, pp. 16.

<sup>18</sup>See for instance the landmark study highlighting the limits of economic interdependence in managing domestic public policy issues: Reuveny and Li 2003; Li and Reuveny 2009.

1968, 1972) views, with their rightful focus on the material redistributive struggles, as well as that of Habermasian (Habermas 1998)<sup>19</sup> advocacy on communicative action, deliberately emphasizing identity and community politics. Although it conceives justice in the sense advocated by Nancy Fraser (1995) in terms of redistribution, identity, and representation via linguistics, I take the “critical element” in critical theory as primarily and initially comprised of two quintessential elements: *redistribution and identity*. This means that recognition of one’s identity in macro-democratic politics only happens *if and only if* trans-generational injustices within the macro-political economy of economic distribution have been ultimately rectified. Taking the classical Marxist view, one must note that the success of identity politics is constitutively interlinked with the success of material distribution. After all, the infrastructural power for representing the cause of emancipation is fundamentally supported by the extent of material base through which the power of representation emanates, and that the very base of material power can only be made possible by first addressing redistribution issues. But embracing these emancipatory causes does not necessarily mean that the society takes much ontological priority over the human individual, which the (neo) liberals may perhaps dispute to be philosophically wrong. On the contrary, the very idea of emancipation and securing justice on behalf of those who were deprived from such, in principle, goes back to the importance of the human individual—freedom, in both negative and positive senses. With all of these taken into account, and going back to Wyn Jones’ query of the rightful addressee of theorizing toward emancipation, the apt answer lies in securing *both* positive and negative freedoms of the human individual. In so doing, democratization scholarship will never be objective; it is *always subjective* in the sense that it should and will *always be subjected* to inter-subjective interests for which one *must*, normatively speaking, be mindful of. And since emancipation is a worthy cause not only for re-securing once again the ontological freedoms of the human individual, it also, concurrently, becomes a quintessential justification for establishing societal stability and harmony—that is, consolidating the new democratic regimes. At the bare minimum, emancipation assumes the *concurrently equal* normative importance of both the individual and the society.

Moreover, considering that promoting economic justice should happen across the transnational spheres of the global political economy, the full emancipation of the human individual normatively begins by transforming the global order. This is in no way of saying that the local is now *normatively* and *praxeologically* unnecessary, but that the transnational/global becomes the ultimate focal point of emancipatory advocacy, analysis, and reform.

The second aspect of what I hopefully think should be a *new research agenda* is the *epistemological preference that is pluralist, true to its advocacy of emancipation*. This means that, in the quest for emancipatory democracy and stability, the academy has to be tolerant toward multiple pathways to theorizing. In other words, there are different theorizing paths leading to the same destination. This being the case, however, does not mean that “anything can be done” shall be the academy’s research motto. Indeed, most, if not all, in the social science vocation aspire for macro-level theorization leading to macro-level praxeological implications and applications. Instead, this means that scientific realists, hard positivists, post-structuralists, among many others, must reconsider an *inter-paradigm dialogue*. Particularly, this ensures that various epistemological routes’ explanatory and predictive powers are maximized to their full theoretical-analytical purchase in order to enrich our understanding of how the global political economy and other transnational material factors are necessary explanatory variables for political instability within the national-domestic spheres. It also enriches our

<sup>19</sup>See also Wyn Jones, *Critical Theory and World Politics*, pp. 16

understanding of how and under what conditions do global/transnational factors deprive and enrich the positive and negative freedoms of the human person.

Third, analysts of democratization must now *avoid the analytical limitations* by the excessive focus on explanatory variables found within the nation-state to explain macro-social instabilities—or even the micro-individualism espoused by rational-choice theorists. This problem is reflected, for instance, in the problematic analytical propensity of HI to view the nation-state as the focal point where institutions emerge. This is the case most especially in comparative politics. A close kin of HI, *rational institutionalism*, meanwhile, owing its lineage to economics, focuses too much on the rational and utility-maximizing actions of microeconomic actors as they aggregately induce social and political change. Such view, without doubt, is indeed myopic especially when explaining complex problems such as democratic consolidation. The microeconomic logic of rational institutionalism is indeed insufficient in explaining the multi-variant, macro-societal, and multi-scalar dynamics of emancipatory democratization. The “multi-perspectival” and truly cosmopolitan search for explanatory variables is indeed the way to go for comparativists of democratization—a route that many sociological theorists have already been aware of in the past few years (Chernilo 2006; Therborn 2000; Wimmer and Schiller 2002; Beck and Grande 2010).

Consequently, as hegemonic interests of the Western core play a critical role in the political economy of the peripheral East, these hegemonic norms and dynamics are both characterized by two obvious and not-so-obvious crescendos: *first*, the global and sub-global *material* infrastructures that support hegemonic interests of the West; *second*, the notion that hegemonic norms are transfused, sustained, and dynamically transformed by the fact that they are *ideationally* embedded across various discursive realms at the global, national, and local levels. Agreeing with Wolf (2004), a *new emancipatory agenda in the democratization scholarship* should realize that the key source of explanatory variables would be the “*international society*” (or what I appropriately and neutrally call the “*transnational realm*”) that basically consists of powerful norms that states have to abide by in order to conform to the global norms of “civilized behavior.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the *new research agenda* that I am advocating posits that “state policies are not the outcome of national requirements,”<sup>21</sup> but takes a more nuanced stance by saying that weaker states, such as new electoral democracies in the Global South, are more susceptible in succumbing to the hegemonic interests of the core. In such conception, therefore, the supposed newly democratized state assumes a mere subservient agential role, implying that domestic yet democratically constituted interests are not always upheld. As a matter of fact, it is the hegemonic core of the global political economy that renders the normative structure and performative actions of the weak democratic state in the Global South always in moral shamble, thus making the *global* more destructively powerful than the weak yet sometimes emancipatory *national*.

Fourth, a *new agenda* should aim to have the normative empathy in the analysis of democratization—which many other “institutionalisms” (Immergut 1998) may not have. This means that there should be an explicit and well-articulated emphasis on directly addressing pressing issues on social justice, namely redistributive and identity politics. Particularly, it considers “social science”—as an analytical and systematic inquiry of an inter-subjective and material reality—as being bounded by an all-encompassing *inter-subjective objective*: the ultimate eschatological salvation of humanity from institutional and non-institutional oppressions and injustices. In this regard, scientific realists who do comparative politics

<sup>20</sup>Hobson, *The State and International Relations* (Hobson, 2000:149–151).

<sup>21</sup>Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, pp. 151.

research of democratization should now be more mindful of clear, direct, and emancipatory policy implications of their research—and more importantly be more explicit that the goal is not solely to explain and to predict, but also to make meaningful and just transformations in the society. Even a notable scientific realist in International Relations such as Keohane (2008)<sup>22</sup> has now began stating the obvious—and in this regard, it is necessary to quote his words extensively:

We do not study international relations for aesthetic reasons, since world politics is not beautiful. If we sought scientific rigor, we would have pursued careers in experimental disciplines. Instead, we are motivated by normative questions, often asked urgently in the wake of disasters...Students of world politics have an obligation to democratic publics to help them understand the most pressing problems of the current day. Yet this moral obligation does not imply that we should focus on topical issues or be “policy-relevant” in a narrow sense by speaking to governments in terms that are acceptable to them. Our task is to probe the deeper sources of action in world politics, and to speak truth to power — insofar as we can discern what the truth is.

Praxeological significance, on the other hand, is another issue in which a prospective new research agenda may seek to underscore amidst the seemingly silent treatment it gets from mainstream *critical theoretical social studies*. In this regard, it is no wonder that Wyn Jones<sup>23</sup> laments how post-positivism is annoyingly “detached from vital questions of public policy and governance.” And this clearly echoes how post-positivists, though deeply concerned with questions of emancipation, appear to be clueless on how they can make ivory-tower-driven ideas into ultimate praxeological reality.

Fifth, notwithstanding that the ultimate objective of a new agenda is to bring authentic human emancipation into fruition, the researcher should maintain a certain level of analytical objectivity by focusing on how material factors influence, and substantively determine, ideational hegemonic interests — thus bringing out a preferred analytical synthesis of the ideational and the material. For instance, in explaining the sources of democratic consolidation, the analyst must appreciate how neoliberal ideology is both an independent and dependent variable for explaining instability of developing democracies, and by doing so, it requires also how such ideology becomes successful in promoting injustices through the ideational and material spheres. What is even more bothering is the fact that the *despicably disempowered poor* were led to believe that their condition is merely and solely caused by their own “fault.” Yet, what the neoliberal spinner of yarns hid under the rug is that the transnational capitalists’ indefatigable success was made possible through the systemic *material extraction* of advantages from those in the global bottom, and perhaps more importantly, through a powerful neoliberal *ideational indoctrination of the disadvantaged* that the poor individual *him/herself* is the only one to be blamed for all these global mess. Notwithstanding, a *new agenda* has to be primarily concerned with sketching out causal and constitutive mechanisms of how material and ideational factors located at the global political economy induce national-domestic instabilities. This is in full resonance with one of Steve Smith’s *Six Wishes for a More Relevant Discipline* in which he argues that there is a need for a “focus on the relationship between the material and the ideational” (Smith 2009).

Finally, a *new agenda* may be considered as one pathway in realizing what Wyn Jones<sup>24</sup> calls “critical praxeology” by realizing “the moral deficits of international

<sup>22</sup>See pp. 708–709.

<sup>23</sup>Wyn Jones, *Critical Theory and World Politics*, pp. 36–37.

<sup>24</sup>Wyn Jones, *Critical Theory and World Politics*.

society and to stress immanent possibilities and desirable directions.” Comparativists of democratization—scientific realist or not—should chart new research initiatives on how the global political economy becomes a macro-social manufacturing center of norms that perpetuate inequalities, injustices, and moral corruption. We should also aim to pinpoint specific policy problems, to diagnose the underlying macro-social causes of instabilities by referring to the global-national-local nexus as a fertile source of explanatory variables, to provide an immanent critique of the larger ideational system through which such empirical norms subsist, and to sketch prospective pathways in liberating institutions and agents from a corrupt ideological “language-game” which acts as the operational logic of its debased praxis.

### **Concluding Remarks: Bringing the Global Political Economy Back in “Democratization Scholarship”**

The problems in the Global South have been brought on to a completely different level—a sort of deceitful game where hegemonic interests, determinative of the economic fate of the powerless, can be located in various geographical scales that transcend the highly pretentious and fictional boundaries of the nation-states in the Global South. To a large extent, equitability is in fundamental opposition with the fundamental aims of the vigorous defenders of unrestrained neoliberal financial globalization. Thus, global economics has a big stake in the life expectancy of new electoral democracies. Consequently, a holistic ontology of multi-scalar interdependence from global, national, and local economics must always be acknowledged—thus, *bringing global economics back in the analysis of the democratic politics of the nation*. While a full-blown empirical application of my proposed approach is way beyond the scope of this essay, I sketched in detail some of the fundamental normative and epistemological shortcomings of the current “*substantive-endogenous*” and mainstream understandings of democratization and thereafter articulated some corrective suggestions on how democratization analysts could possibly escape from such analytical imprisonment.

Moreover, I also argued that the social science academy has been absolutely beguiled by the analytical narrowness of methodological nationalism, the structural determinism of historical-institutionalism, as well as the willful blindness in the determinative role of trans-scalar hegemonic norms that constitute the dynamics of democratic stability in the Global South. My suggestions for a *new research agenda* may be reasonably anticipated as one step forward in finding a possible panacea for the methodological and normative ills of the sub-field of comparative politics of democratization. It recognizes multi- and trans-scalar flows and interplay of power relations while still being empathetic to the real-world tribulations and oppressions in global politics. It embraces the emancipatory agenda of critical theory, but evades the mistake of being severely fixated by the ivory tower’s over-abstraction of ontology and epistemology. It is also reformist on two counts. First, it transcends the methodological limitations of comparative politics, by avoiding an obsessive focus on the nation-state as the only geographical source of explanatory variables. Second, it invites mainstream social scientists to rethink their foundational normative understandings of democracy and political stability. Having said that, I do admit, however, that the suggestions I offer in this essay are in no way conclusive; instead, they should be taken as provocative yet substantive talking points of an open debate that critically challenges the normative and epistemological shortcomings of the comparative politics of democratization.

To use John Keane’s (2009) phrase, the “life and death of democracy” ultimately depends on how the supposedly democratic system itself is able to uphold socioeconomic justice among its citizenry (Regilme 2012b). This means

that true democracy does not seek to entrench ruling hegemonic interests that undermine social justice; rather, it seeks to emancipate the citizenry from the excessive vulgarity of hegemony through which material injustices emerge. Democracy is not an end-in-itself, but a means through which peaceful, just, and stable societal life can be upheld, and consequently a desirable individual life at the micro-level. Achieving such political utopia, so to speak, is now more arduous than before as the dynamics of the problem is now much more multi-faceted, especially with the involvement of the global with the national-local dynamics. A good start, nonetheless, is by making a political science of comparative politics much more empathetic, sensitive, and critical—and hopefully, thereafter, emancipatory in its inherent teleology. But seriously, how can the most celebrated political scientists studying democratization escape from such *analytical trap* if their *personal politics is neoliberal yet they justify such politics as “science”*?

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