

# Towards a Process-oriented Model of Democratisation or De-Democratisation

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*Abstract:* The dominant 'theories of democracy' focus on the 'institutional shell' of democratisation and de-democratisation processes. In this paper, I introduce a process sociological model of understanding of such processes which also includes the two other important dimensions of democratisation and de-democratisation, the functional and the habitual dimensions.

*Keywords:* the drag effect of social habitus, institutional de-democratisation, non-simultaneity of developments, main axes of tension, functional and habitual democratisation.

Democratisation processes of each society are accompanied by severe tensions and conflicts. They are very closely connected with counter-processes in the opposite direction. The path such processes take depends on the power ratio between different groups affected in the respective society. As an example, the current developments in Egyptian society after the 'Arab Spring' illustrate how these counter-processes could prevail after a spurt of democratisation of institutions as a result of the collapse of an authoritarian political system. The increasing power potential of General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi as a person is very much connected to the power potential of his position in the Egyptian society. After the inability of different political groups to find a common ground through concessions and compromises, the position of the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces has become important for the re-creation of stability and security after a period of political chaos. As the person holding this increasingly powerful position, al-Sisi will eventually take his chance to monopolise and institutionalise as much as possible the existing power resources in Egyptian society and abolish the recent relative democratisation of political institutions in his country. Although, Egypt's military has denied that its popular commander-in-chief had told a Kuwaiti newspaper he was running for president, [1],[#N1].discussions of this step are a sign of his important role in Egyptian society after the fall of Husni Mubarak. [2],[#N2].This does not mean that General al-Sisi will *necessarily* win the battle at the end. Everything depends on the changing power ratio between different other groups in Egyptian society, which at the moment seems to be in favour of the General as the army leader.

How can such de-democratisation processes in a society be understood and explained? In the absence of differentiated and comprehensive theories of democratisation and de-democratisation, I would like to offer in this paper a process sociological model of democratisation and de-democratisation which can help us to understand and explain such processes in a more reality congruent manner. The mentioned model was developed in the late 1980s by Dawud Gholamasad through his reception of the ideas of Norbert Elias. It is based on empirical studies of social and political developments in Iran before and after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The model deals with a critique of 'process-reduced' [3],[#N3] and static theories of democracy, which are mainly confined to the present and the manifest or *institutional* dimension of democratisation processes (Gholamasad 2007: 58; Elias 1978: 65–68). These dominant theories of democracy, which are mainly developed from a political science and less sociological point of view, neglect not only the latent, or *functional*, but also the *habitual* dimension of democratisation processes (Gholamasad 1993: 394). An attempt to capture the habitual dimension is made with the aid of undifferentiated concepts such as 'political culture' (Eckstein

1988: 789). Using such theories, however, one is not able to grasp the problem of ‘non-simultaneity of developments’ [4],[#N4] between these three *institutional*, *functional* and *habitual* dimensions in the course of democratisation and de-democratisation processes of a society.

In summary, one could say that the dominant ‘theories of democracy’ went through two different periods in the second half of the twentieth century. The theories developed at the end of the twentieth century, for example by O’Donnell, Schmitter and Przeworski, broke with the focus of earlier theorists of the 1960s and 1970s, like Lipset and Moore, who emphasised macrosocietal forces and conditions. Theorists from the late 1980s considered the previous work as deterministic, which did not see any role played by political actors in promoting and consolidating democracy. While the earlier theorists put ‘structures’ and ‘conditions’ which are not easily changed in the foreground, the second generation of theorists emphasised a bigger role for ‘relevant actors’ and ‘political elites’ in changing such structures and conditions. Thus, a kind of a rather voluntaristic approach replaced the former deterministic perspectives in a polarised debate, with far-reaching theoretical and practical consequences. In this way, the question of consolidation and durability of newly created democratic institutions gained prominence, especially in the link between ‘democracy’ and economic reforms (Munck 2011: 334–335). ‘Democracy promotion’ as an instrument for building new state institutions and strengthening ‘civil society’ became of significant importance, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Burnell 2009: 1). Since then, ‘Democracy Promotion’ as a political strategy increasingly became one of the priorities of US foreign policy (Cox 2000: 5). This aim could be reached through a wide variety of strategies and actions, operating across a spectrum from peaceful to forceful means (Hobson and Kurki 2012: 3). A discussion of the implications of this kind of understanding of the term ‘democracy’ would go beyond the scope of this paper.

By neglecting the role of long term social and political structures in resisting the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule, such theories have come under pressure to offer an adequate explanation. [5],[#N5] Since the weakening and failing of new democratic institutions in different Eastern and south European and Middle Eastern countries, such as Iraq after Saddam Hussein and Afghanistan after Taliban rule, one has to ask what is the exact relationship between the work of agency of individuals who try to plan and enforce democratic institutions and the long existing functional and habitual relationships and constraints in a society, without putting the absolute emphasis on one of these closely connected levels. The process sociological model of democratisation and de-democratisation offered in this paper claims to empirically demonstrate the specific relationship between the long term structures and the attempts of individual ‘agents’ to change these structures. In particular, the problem of the collapse of newly created democratic institutions as the result of the ‘drag effect of the social habitus’ will be given extensive attention in this paper. To put it another way, the problem of the lagging of the patterns of feeling and behaviour of people involved in the democratisation processes of the respective society at functional and institutional levels will be discussed. The term ‘social habitus’ will serve in this context as a conceptual instrument to overcome the polarised debate over ‘agency versus structure’ and to see the complex relationship between individuals and society more realistically.

This democratic model was empirically tested and expanded by the author based on development processes of three societies. The structural similarities of processes in these societies were studied; in the research in general these are discussed as *failure* of the Second Republic in France (1848–1852), of the Weimar Republic in Germany (1918–1933) and of the Constitutional Monarchy in Iran (1906–1925) (Alikhani 2012). An attempt was made to overcome the opposite positions between cultural relativism and Eurocentric ideological theories in order to come conceptually closer to the *structural similarities* of these *institutional de-democratisation processes* [6],[#N6] in these three different societies at different stages of development, despite differences in the *form* and *shape* of these processes. The conceptual tools of this model and its theoretical implications allow synchronic and diachronic comparisons to be carried out between different societies. Thus

one is empirically not only able to demonstrate the long-term direction of the dynamics of democratisation and de-democratisation processes in today's complex European societies, but also those processes in societies which by our common concepts of democracy have not been considered as 'democracies'.

The empirical studies of Norbert Elias, particularly his 'Studies on the Germans', will serve as an example of institutional de-democratisation processes as a consequence of the lagging of social habitus of the people affected behind the newly created institutions, in a more differentiated society than that of Iran in 1905–1925. Elias demonstrates a direct link between the seizures of power by National Socialists and the long term developments of the attitudes of the Germans which were shaped in a rather authoritarian manner. According to him, the creation of democratic parliamentary institutions after the World War I could not lead to the democratisation of attitudes and systems of belief of the Germans (Elias 1996: 337). This type of governance, which requires compromise and is based on discussions and arguments, gave the hostility of the Germans, with their relatively simple personality structures towards each other, extra nutrition (Elias 1999: 411). According to Elias, in the course of traumatic experience of violent conflicts during the Weimer Republic, the longing for the old form of rule with a permanent control from 'outside' became even stronger for the majority of Germans. This longing was expressed in demands for a 'strong man' at the top of this form of rule who could bring people involved to unity and oneness again and put an end to the divisiveness (Elias 1996: 317–318). Such a man makes decisions, gives orders from the top and takes the heavy burden of responsibility from the shoulders of others (Elias 1996: 388):

The cumulative experiences of fragmentation and the corresponding self-image of the Germans as people who are not capable of living together without discord and quarreling also found expression in the longing for a sovereign, a man monarch, a strong leader who would be able to bring them to unity and consensus (Elias 1996: 318).

Today, Elias would probably ask himself, would General al-Sisi act as the same 'strong man' in Egyptian society, who could bring order and security from the top and end all violent conflicts? The empirical study of Elias on Germans, as he implies, can also serve as a theoretical model to study the similarly structured processes in different societies beyond their level of developments:

When, therefore, in a nation, or some of its powerful sections, forms of belief, conscience and ideals – in short, levels of control within the personality itself – are traditionally strict and authoritarian as was the case in Germany, people will, in all probability, turn to leaders with similar characteristics (Elias 1996: 343–344).

Both Elias and Gholamasad give emphasis to the two relatively neglected dimensions of democratisation processes, namely the *functional* and *habitual*. With the aid of the more precise and differentiated process sociological concepts, they also try to elaborate the relationship of these two dimensions with each other and with the *institutional* dimension. No dimension is 'the motor', 'the base' or 'the cause' of the other dimensions. They are accompanying and partial processes of a relatively long-term societal transformation process and are in a constant feedback-process with each other. These processes have neither a particular beginning nor a certain end and are, in contrast to natural processes, reversible at any time (Elias 1991: 33).

One can notice several spurts or breaches in the path of these processes that simplistically are divided under these three above-mentioned dimensions. The distinction between the dimensions is to be understood only as an introduction to the model. These three dimensions and their relationship to each other are first discussed

in detail below. The empirical application regarding this model can be referred to in the above-mentioned studies by Elias, Gholamasad and the present author. In these studies, there is a more differentiated distinction between the development of various sociopolitical movements and groups and the associated competition and elimination struggles in the course of democratisation and de-democratisation processes in different societies.

## 1. The functional dimension of democratisation processes

The term ‘functional democratisation’ (Elias 1978: 68; 1996: 30) refers to the extension and densification of the network of chains of dependencies between people, developed in the course of interwoven industrialisation, commercialisation, urbanisation, secularisation and individualisation processes. [7],[#N7]An individual person will increasingly depend on more people, due to the peculiarity of his position and function to satisfy existential needs. These processes take place in the course of the ongoing specialisation and differentiation of social activities and functions in a society (Gholamasad 2010: 51–53; Elias 1978: 67). Parallel to them and with the growth of functional dependencies between members of the same society, balances of power will shift in favour of the previously less powerful and more dependent individuals and groups. In the course of these processes, the structure of society becomes more differentiated and complex. Accordingly, the whole positions of individual people in this society as well as their relationship to each other change in a specific way (Gholamasad 1993: 395; Elias 1978: 67–70). New functions and positions gradually emerge in the affected society, while the old ones become gradually de-functionalised. The process of densification of the network of human interdependencies therefore goes hand in hand with social ascent and descent processes (Gholamasad 1997: 364). Basically, the change in the structure of relationships between people and their power relations reflects the structural change of society. [8],[#N8]

These directed but unplanned structural transformations increase the scope of action and decision-making of every individual. This process has been highlighted in the philosophical tradition by the static and reifying term ‘freedom’. By using dual terms such as ‘freedom’ and ‘lack of freedom’, the process character of long-term social transformations is overlooked. The term ‘scope of action and decision-making’, by contrast, brings shifts in the balance of the scope for decisions and actions of individuals in different social functions and positions to the fore (Elias 1996: 69). The range of this scope extends or decreases depending on the ‘figuration’ people form with each other (Elias 2006a: 73–76). Moreover, it is in these terms neither about a zero point nor an end point, as is implied by ideologically combative terms. The degree of this scope is always differentially limited and variable from society to society. This limitation and variability depends on the type and degree of individual bonds and the strength of mutual interdependencies of different individuals and groups in society. The structure of the society and the peculiarity of the functions that people have for each other are crucial for the range of the scope of decision-making and the extent of the scope of action of single individuals (Elias 2001: 52).

The scope of decision-making of single individuals depends on their positions as well as the network of their functional and emotional dependencies in society. The limits of this scope are set by different social positions and functions occupied by other individuals in the society. The network of positions and functions is here not reducible to its individual components. This network has a relative autonomy from its constituent single individuals, but not from individuals in general. The dynamic of human interdependence for the development of the structure of the intertwining of these positions and functions is usually more compelling than the decisions of single individuals. However, this does not mean that single individuals have no influence on the

course of social events at all. According to the degree of individualisation in a society, single individuals can exert different influence on the direction of societal developments. If one wants to do justice to the real structure of social processes, one needs to distance oneself from the old ideological power struggles between collectivistic-deterministic and liberal-individualistic theoretical approaches and begin to search for more reality congruent 'images of human beings' (Elias 2001: 84–86).

## 1.1. The change in the main axes of tension in the course of functional democratisation processes

The functional democratisation processes are nowadays taking place along at least five 'main axes of tension' (Elias 1996: 149). The emphasis on these axes of tension allows a simpler and more vivid understanding of processes of functional democratisation. In addition to the axes of tension between governed and governors – which is considered as almost the only axis of tension by many 'theories of democracy' – processes of functional democratisation can also be observed in the shift of the balance of power between men and women, parents and children, different ethnic and religious groups, entrepreneurs and workers, the former colonised and colonial peoples and further social formations (Gholamasad 1997: 365; Gholamasad 1999: 31; Elias 1996: 25–26). On any of these main axes of tension, formerly established groups become more dependent on their respective outsider groups, which were previously largely excluded from access to power and status monopolies (Gholamasad 1993: 396). At the political level, these processes are the most striking. As long as the power differentials between rulers and ruled are very large, it appears to the rulers as if they existed only for themselves. With shifts in the balance of power on this axis of tension the situation becomes reversed. In the course of processes of functional democratisation the rulers become increasingly dependent on the ruled. Due to the increasing differentiation of social functions and the increasing of the degree of complexity of links of interdependence between governors and governed the course of events become, even for the most gifted politicians, increasingly unclear. Rulers experience a steady decrease in their ability to steer and control social events. They are forced to exercise restraint to a far higher degree in consequence of newly established social interweaving and bonds (Gholamasad 1999: 31). Throughout these changes, sooner or later organisational forms of people also transform both the rulers and the ruled, if the power shifts to some extent remain stable and permanent. This is regardless of whether the rulers perceive this power shift early enough and accordingly give suitable answers, or do not perceive these processes and try to slow or block them. In the course of these processes, the previously weaker outsider groups in turn gain more 'chances of control and steering' over the behaviour of the previously established and more powerful groups. The democratisation of power relations between rulers and ruled, however, is, as mentioned, just one aspect of the democratisation of the hierarchical order of a society toward a 'socialisation of monopolies of power and status' (Gholamasad 1999: 31; Elias 2009: 271).

Parallel to these transformations at the political level, the balance of power changes between the established and the outsiders in favour of the latter on the other main axes of tensions as well. For example, the structure of the family and the relationships between parents and children, men and women, brothers and sisters alter with the change of interdependencies between them. The power differentials in the family become more equal or – in a process sociological language – *democratise themselves functionally*. The father's monopoly of power within the family – which was connected with his defence and protection function – gradually passes to the newly established state institutions. The father, 'the master of the house', becomes in a way de-functionalised. He increasingly loses his power of control and regulation within his (family) 'unit of survival'. Through this power shift, the children and the woman gain more scope for decision-making and action, thus 'freedom'. In other words, their 'power chances' increase. The term 'power' along with its related term 'function' has here to be understood as a relationship term:

The word 'power' again is usually used as if it referred to an isolated object in a state of rest. Instead we have shown that power denotes a relationship between two or more people, or perhaps even between people and natural objects, that power is an attribute of relationships, and that the word is best used in conjunction with a reminder about more or less fluctuating changes in power. That is an example of a concept traditionally based on static components being turned into a concept of relationship (Elias 1978: 116).

## 2. The habitual dimension

The habitual dimension of democratisation processes refers to the more or less reality adequate perception of these shifted power differentials in favour of outsider groups, especially, by outsider groups themselves. The institutionalisation of the new balance of power often requires the more or less conscious experience of these shifts (Gholamasad 1997: 365–366). According to Gholamasad and Elias, for the people concerned there will be a gradual change throughout these processes of perception and experience in terms of the common social structure of their individual behaviour, their language and mindset, their emotions and especially the formation of their consciences and ideals (Gholamasad 2001: 619; Elias 2001: 148–149). Gholamasad points out that he used to employ the term 'social personality structure' for the capturing of similar processes, before his knowledge of the concept of 'social habitus' developed by Elias. Therefore he used to try to explain the development of 'habitus problems' from the 'non-simultaneity of developments' of social and personality structures of interdependent people (Gholamasad 1985: 559–583; Elias 2001: 211). He gives the reason why he regards the term coined by Elias as more reality congruent as follows:

But now, I prefer the more precise concepts developed by Elias, because they explicitly emphasise not only the reversibility of social processes. In addition, the concept of social habitus is more comprehensive than the concept 'social personality structure'. Accordingly, this concept allows me to grasp both catch-up effect and drag effect of the social habitus of complementary psychogenic processes (Gholamasad 2001: 617).

From this process-sociological perspective, the concept of social habitus refers to a specific and more or less individualised stamp which every single individual shares with other members of his or her society. This stamp is a 'change continuum', which results from the process character of single individuals and their interdependencies (Gholamasad 2001: 617–618). By studying the habitual dimension of democratisation processes it becomes possible to ascertain whether the people affected by these processes can identify with the new institutions that emerge in the course of functional democratisation processes. This allows one to gain a scientific access to the emotional anchoring of the new processes and the degree of emotional satisfaction for the people involved. To put it simply, the habitual dimension of democratisation refers to the deep internalisation of these new institutions and functional connections. Only then can these processes gain an enormous strength in the steering of conduct and feeling of the involved people, which can be socially inherited:

As self-evident and unchecked patterns of experience and behaviour which pass from one generation to another, institutionalised modes of behaviour gain only as a function of behaviour-steering if these sets of rules are anchored, as being socially allowed and required, in the consciousness and the organism of relatively autonomous people, meaning in their beliefs,

thoughts, motives, feelings, needs and reactions in relationship with certain institutions (Gholamasad 1992: 8).

In the course of habitual democratisation, a process of ‘civilising’ of codes of behaviour and feeling of the people affected takes place. The term ‘civilising’ differs, in this process-sociological perspective, from its everyday use as an expression of self-consciousness of the ‘Western’ societies. This unplanned but ordered process is always accompanied by counter processes and indicates a successive structural change in the standards of human behaviour and feeling towards a very specific direction:

As a directed change of social habits of people Norbert Elias shows in his study how external constraints transform from various sides into self-constraints: how in more and more differentiated form human affairs are displaced behind the scenes of social life, covered with feelings of shame and how through a constant self-control, the regulations of the whole drives and affects life become more all-embracing, even, and stable (Gholamasad 1999: 30; Elias 2009: 365).

Through the increasing civilising of interpersonal relationships in the course of habitual democratisation processes, physical violence as a principle of regulation of competition and elimination struggles for the available power and status opportunities becomes suspended from social life (Gholamasad 2006b: 64; 2002a: 19). The balance between rights and duty awareness shifts in favour of the former. Accordingly, ‘immature subjects’ who are oriented towards authoritarian rule are transformed into ‘mature citizens’ with a relatively autonomous conscience (Gholamasad 2007: 62–64). Other complementary processes, to which Elias in his numerous works refers, such as the shifting of the balance of I-and we-identity or self- and external-control in favour of the former in each case, also take place over the course of the processes of habitual democratisation.

### 3. The institutional dimension

The institutional dimension of democratisation processes refers to the manifestation of the shifted power balances in favour of previously less powerful groups in the course of functional democratisation processes. This manifestation is associated with a more reality-congruent experience of power shifts by the people involved and thus with habitual democratisation. Over these relatively slow and long-term processes, the former outsider groups can increasingly participate in the sources of power and status monopolised by established groups, from which they were previously institutionally excluded (see Gholamasad 2001: 620). The evolved institutions often reflect the particular social needs of the majority of people in a society:

As for many single individuals a constant form of human relationship, as a specific structure of interconnection of people arises from the interweaving of the behaviour of many individual human being, each institution becomes relatively independent from these (single individuals) as a behaviour-steering power. As such emotionally anchored patterns of behaviour and experience each institution gains a compelling force that can be adequately conceived as a force of interdependence. It embodies a need formula, which in each case welds together the various people and groups into a figuration and holds them in the figuration as well (Gholamasad 1992: 8).

The manifestation of power shifts can find expression in different forms, including norms, laws and other institutions. The emergence of the suffrage movement and the development of new political organisations for the competition and elimination struggles between groups of people, such as political parties and trade unions, are just a few aspects of these transformations over the course of processes of institutional democratisation. As part of these processes impersonal forms of organisation replace the former rather personal forms of organisation (Gholamasad 1997: 366).

In the preceding centuries, access to the central monopoly power chances of the state and influence over appointments to government posts was usually confined to small, dynastic, aristocratic elites. However, the changes in the texture of human relationships which occurred in each of the more developed countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were such that no section of society remained simply a relatively passive object of domination by others. None of them remained without institutional channels through which they could exercise pressure, directly or indirectly, upon governments, and in some cases they could influence appointments to government offices. The emergence of mass political party organisations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was simply a manifestation of this limited reduction of the power differentials between governments and governed. Seen in the perspective of our own times, these power differentials certainly remained large enough. Seen in the perspective of the long-term development of societies, however, the chances of the bulk of the governed to exercise a measure of control over governments, relative to the chances of governments to control the governed, became somewhat greater than they had been (Elias 1978: 66).

As a result of this process the institutional multipolarity and reciprocity of control amongst various social groups increases. The dominant research in the field of democracy theories has primarily been concerned with this institutional dimension of democratisation processes. Democratisation processes, in particular the process of institutional de-democratisation, however, can hardly be understood and explained without the involvement of the other two dimensions, particularly the habitual dimension. This dimension is often conceptualised by the imprecise and undifferentiated term 'culture'. In this respect democratisation problems are often perceived as cultural problems rather than 'civilising' problems, in the technical sense of the term as discussed above.

### 3.1. Institutional de-democratisation processes as function of drag effect of the social habitus

Over processes of democratisation in a society there may be periods in which there is a consequential 'non-simultaneity of developments' of the three mentioned dimensions of the democratisation processes. The borrowed term from Ernst Bloch, 'non-simultaneity of developments', was replaced by Gholamasad in his later studies on the genesis of the emergence of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 by the more precise and dynamic concept 'drag effect of the social habitus', as coined by Elias (2001: 211). Through this balance-concept one could better become aware of the development of the democratisation and de-democratisation processes in both directions (Gholamasad 2001: 617). The term 'drag effect of the social habitus' in this sense refers to the consequences of transformation of self-experience of the people concerned 'dragging' behind social transformation:



As habitus problems arise spurts of de-civilizing in a constellation in which the dynamics of unplanned social processes over a certain level push forward to a next higher or lower level, while the people affected by this change are still persevering in their personality structure, thus in their social habitus on an earlier stage (Gholamasad 2001: 619; Elias 2001: 211).

In this respect, newly emerged institutions and functional connections do not necessarily result in stable integration units in the wake of functional democratisation which can satisfy as identification units the emotional and 'material' needs of the people affected (Gholamasad 1997: 366). In these cases, the entire patterns of behaviour and feeling of the people can lag behind the real power shifts, because the perception of this new constellation of power and the development of new patterns of behaviour and feeling are relatively slow and tedious processes. [9],[#N9]

The transition from an autocratic-dynastic to a parliamentary nation-state, for example, requires the overcoming of the older and more familiar patterns of thinking and speaking, and the emergence of new more reality-congruent concepts that adequately represent this new constellation of power and make the real relations more communicable. In general, however, the language, the emotional state and especially the conscience and ideal formation – in other words, the social habitus of individuals – change more slowly, compared with the relatively rapid transformation of societal structure during a spurt of integration (Gholamasad 1997: 366; Elias 2001: 148–149). The accustomed I-and we- images, including the images of I- and we-ideals of the people which became their 'second nature', can resist the rapid functional changes: *'They oppose all the manifold innovations that the transition to a new integration level entails'* (Elias 2001: 214).

Thus, not only will the scope of 'we-feeling' of those affected and the boundary of their sense of belonging remain behind the new integration unit, but also the structure of their psychic apparatus will lag behind changing realities. [10],[#N10] People avoid any kind of conflict of loyalties, which may be associated with the shift of emotional bounds and so with the change of 'figuration of valences'. [11],[#N11] In this respect, the civilising or habitual constraints which are required to maintain the new integration unit – namely greater long-term and more stable, all-embracing and even self-control – have only limited influence at the behavioural level. The emotional ties of the affected people to the older and more familiar units of integration, which represent the emotionally deeper anchored layers of their social habitus, set the boundaries of the frame of reference of their I- and we-images as well as I- and we-ideals. They more or less consciously defend with all their strength these safety and security giving boundaries. Any attempt to reorganise the previously familiar patterns of perception and to dissolve the old emotional ties can lead to insecurity and disorientation. Disintegration of the old functional connections often means a loss of the sense of meaning in their life and a threat to their psychic and social existence because the painful experience of disorientation has far-reaching consequences for the stability of the human psyche (Gholamasad 1994: 13):

The basic structure of the idea we have of ourselves and other people is a fundamental precondition of our ability to deal successfully with other people and, at least within the confines of our own society, to communicate with them. If it is called into question, our own security is threatened. What was certain becomes uncertain. One is like a person suddenly thrown into the sea, with no sight of dry land. Unquestioned assumptions, the basic structures of thought that we take over with the words of our language without further reflection, are among the indispensable means of orientation without which we lose our way, just as we lose the ability to

orientate ourselves in space if the familiar signposts that determine what we expect to perceive turn out to be unreliable and deceptive (Elias 2001: 92–93).

The fear that human beings are exposed to in the course of the questioning of their previous basic beliefs and values can enlarge the inability of the affected people to distance themselves from themselves and from their own situation. Such circumstances are experienced by the affected people as hopeless. This may in turn lead to greater insecurity and even less control over the sources of danger from which they feel threatened. Thus, the concerned find themselves caught in a social ‘relationship trap’ (Gholamasad 2002b: 390) from which they cannot escape in part because of the increased influence of world-views with a high fantasy content (Gholamasad 1997: 370):

With this insecurity again increases the degree of engagement that with a new degree of affect- and instinct-driven perception contributes to an escalation of the double-bind process or the ‘vicious circle’ of engagement, with corresponding desire and fear images (Gholamasad 1997: 370). [\[12\]](#)<sup>[#N12]</sup>

These experiences can lead to collective traumatic experiences that sink deep into the psychic household of those affected and potentially cause severe damage which especially affects people’s behaviour in the common social coexistence (Elias 1996: 431). A restructuring of the social habitus of people in a society depends on its power of resistance and on the relative strength of the spurt of development in that society. Depending on the structure of the social habitus the ongoing social processes can be slowed down or even blocked (Elias 2001: 211). In such situations, the single emotionally overwhelmed individuals often demand, following the functional democratisation, instead of more ‘socialisation of the state’ a stronger, ‘nationalisation of the society’ (Gholamasad 2001: 626). The less autonomous ‘forensic conscience’ (Gholamasad 2006b: 20) of these individuals in this stressful situation has to deal with these as overwhelming perceived conflicts and yearns again for a stronger external regulation which should support them in this unbearable situation of permanent threat. The political immaturity and the inability – through a corresponding degree of self-control and long-term view – to resolve conflicts with words and through discussions drives these individuals who are less capable of conflict and consensus towards self- and other-destructive thoughts and actions (Gholamasad 1993: 398). In this situation, physical violence can become an important means of regulation of behaviour and feeling. Violence and counter-violence in turn will lead to further insecurity of their own situation and an increased fear of the perceived sources of the threat. The only escape from this double-bind trap apparent to the individuals is the restoration of the old integration unit and its political apparatus, which better correspond to their personality structure which is geared to a previous context of functions and institutions:

Insecure through social transformations which provide him with new challenges, he is usually for his survival in his new social function and position strictly dependent on the more reliable and displeasure-avoiding acquisition and repetition of certain social standards of behaviour. These standards are idealistically offered to him in the form of familiarly and from generations appearing to him as valid codes of conduct and belief systems or in the form of a ‘charismatic personality’ as a living example (Gholamasad 1997: 372).

Thus, the desire for greater external social controls becomes stronger in emotionally overwhelmed individuals who have become uncertain as a result of rapid processes of individualisation. This desire is occasionally manifested in the form of a strong and charismatic man at the top who represents the older and more

dominant layers of social habitus of those concerned. This is accompanied by the hope that this person will finish what the people feel as emotionally repulsive and unbearable. A strong sovereign should assume the whole function of conscience of these people and thus liberate them from the effort of their own formation of judgment and from the burden of responsibility:

Instead of 'pluralism' as reproduction of institutional multipolarity of control, this movement seeks to achieve an 'ideas and group monism', which manifests the relatively low capability of conflict (dealing with conflicts in a democratic and non-violent way) and consensus of social groups that are promoting this movement (Gholamasad 1996: 25, emphasis mine).

The need for security, peace, order and unity stands in contrast to 'open disputes' that are often perceived to be intolerable. The need to participate in the process of governance is replaced by the need of 'being governed from the top' (Elias 1999: 412). Thus, the relatively low differentiated and simple self-control apparatus of these people restores the old relatively conflict-free and straightforward super and subordination relationships in order to overcome the irritating party disputes that arise with the new spurt of development towards institutional democratisation. This can only correspond to a more differentiated and complex self-control apparatus:

For these people, these idealised bids equipped with external constraints assume stronger than before the entire function of conscience, because their self-constraint instances are – in relation to the change resulting from the social dynamics in the way which groups of people are bonded to each other – relatively instinct-permeable, fragile, unstable and less autonomous. Their lagging self-constraints apparently require in this situation a constant support and reinforcement by external constraints (Gholamasad 1996: 368).

From this perspective, one can better understand and explain the seizure of power of Napoleon III in France, Hitler in Germany and Reza Khan in Iran after a short period of institutional democratisation (Alikhani 2012). As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the 'longing for a strong leader' can be currently observed in some Arab countries after the so-called Arab Spring as well as in some 'younger democracies' of Eastern Europe. Hungary under the rule of Viktor Orbán currently offers a clear example of 'institutional de-democratisation'. [13],[#N13] However, according to a study by the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation in March 2011, the desire for authoritarian forms of government grows throughout Europe:

Subsequently, almost one-third of Germans hold the view that a 'strong man' was needed at the top who is not influenced by Parliament or elections. Even in traditional democracies like Britain and France there is more than 40 percent of the population that holds this view. Even in countries such as Portugal and Poland this figure comes to more than 60 percent. [14],[#N14]

However, these processes of de-democratisation are also accompanied by processes in the opposite direction. With the apparent 'crisis of democracy' (Höhn 2007) in many democratic societies, a number of citizens have made attempts to participate directly in political and social events, beyond the usual parliamentary and party-oriented possibilities. The creation of many non-governmental organisations and citizens' initiatives are evidence of this movement towards more functional, habitual and institutional democratisation. In which direction the balance between these two opposite poles – democratisation and de-democratisation – will go, depends on many ongoing intertwining and interdependent processes. The political parties benefiting from

representational and parliamentary democracies impede every step towards the development of more democratic ways of political participation, as if humanity has already achieved the final stage of 'democracy'. Rather than facilitating these democratic changes, they remain bent on protecting their own institutionalised monopolies of status and power.

Regarding functional democratisation processes, one fact seems obvious: the widening of the gap between rich and poor in 'democratic' societies will render them less democratic, in other words, *functionally de-democratised*. [15][#N15]. In these societies, the main sources of power and status are increasingly becoming the monopoly of a few individuals and groups from which the majority of the members of society is being excluded. This majority is facing austerity measures in all social sectors, such as education and the health system. The long-term negative consequences of this functional de-democratisation for the other two dimensions of democratisation processes should not be underestimated.

## Post-Democracy or Processes of De-Democratisation

Colin Crouch is one of the political scientists who have investigated the current state of 'democracy' in some of the Western democratic societies. He has collected evidence to demonstrate how these societies, with a new wave of economical liberalism in the past three decades, have reached a period that he calls 'post-democratic'. This period is, according to him, not structurally the same as the 'pre-democratic' period, but there are some similarities between them. He uses a form of *parable* to show the nature of this transformation (Crouch 2004: 5). According to him, in the 'post-democratic' area, democratic institutions remain formally still intact, but politicians become more dependent on big corporations and financial institutions. In this period, an 'overlapping network of advisers, consultants and lobbyists' increasingly play a very crucial role in defining and equating the interests of these corporations as in the public's interests.

The collapse of the trade unions as important modes of public representation, the privatising of welfare state programs and commercialisation of education and other public services are some of the major features of this period. According to Crouch, this has led to an growing number of politically apathetic, disintegrated, passive and disillusioned citizens who don't see any prospect of real political exertion of influence, as it used to be in the first three decades after the World War II (2004: 4). The role of citizens has been reduced to just participation in elections taking place once every couple of years. Crouch traces back the rise of populist parties and politicians in these societies to the current critical state of democracies through which the disoriented 'shapeless middle mass' are looking for 'new collective identities'.

Through the process sociological understanding of democratisation and de-democratisation processes offered in this paper, the results of the empirical studies of Crouch can be integrated in a more differentiated and dynamic model of democratisation. According to this model, social processes don't necessarily take place in one direction, as Crouch implied. Under specific circumstances, counter-processes could gain the upper hand and social processes could become reversible. The new manifestations of these counter-processes may differ in their *form* and appearance from the periods before, but they share *structural* similarities. In this sense, speaking about three separate periods of democracy (pre-democratic, democratic and post-democratic) could be misleading. A dynamic and process oriented concept of power can overcome the polarising, static and stationary understanding of power and democratisation of Crouch. With the aid of this process sociological concept one is able to empirically investigate the direction of democratisation and de-democratisation processes, beyond different current ideological and polarised debates on 'egalitarian' and 'liberal' democracy. This will be based on diachronic and synchronic comparisons of changes of 'power ratios' between different established and outsider groups in various more or less democratised societies. [16][#N16]. How exactly the

concept of post-democracy could be integrated in a process sociological model of democratisation and de-democratisation is the topic of an extensive and systematic study on which I am currently working. In addition to the theoretical implications of this study, the empirical demonstrations of these processes play a very important role. One of the aims of this study is to prove the discussed model based on new empirical investigations and eventually to refute or develop it further.

## Biography

Behrouz Alikhani completed his Master degree at Teheran University in political sciences and his PhD at Leibniz University of Hanover in sociology and social psychology. Currently, he is a lecturer at the Institute of Sociology at the Westphalian Wilhelms-University in Muenster. His main research focus is on democratisation and de-democratisation processes in different structured societies.

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## Notes

1. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-26062199>. [\[#N1-pt1\]](#)
2. In the case of Tunisia, it remains to be seen whether the new constitution passed in January 2014 will bring unity and stability to the country after nearly three years of political crisis. [\[#N2-pt1\]](#)
3. This term refers to reduction of processes to static conditions (see Elias 1978: 112). [\[#N3-pt1\]](#)
4. The term 'non-simultaneity of developments' refers to the different pace of developments at the three mentioned levels. The focus of this paper is, especially, on the non-simultaneity of developments between institutional and habitual levels which express it in lagging of the latter level behind the former. [\[#N4-pt1\]](#)
5. The current popular discussion of the role of 'Islam' in Egyptian society as a cultural hindrance on 'democracy' is a simplistic discussion. By emphasising the role of 'Islam' one is not able to explain why secular and western oriented groups in Egyptian society behave as undemocratically as the Muslim Brothers. In this paper I will try to demonstrate why the democratisation problems are civilising rather than cultural problems. [\[#N5-pt1\]](#)
6. This term refers to de-democratisation processes at the institutional level, for example, through the passing of a new bill. [\[#N6-pt1\]](#)
7. These usually as 'modernisation' perceived part-aspects of an overall social transformation towards functional democratisation are always accompanied by complementary counter processes. Depending on the changing balance of power between different social groups, these counter processes can also become dominant. The reversibility of social processes distinguishes these from natural processes that occur rather linearly (see Elias 2006b: 221–226 and see Gholamasad 1997: 364). [\[#N7-pt1\]](#)
8. The term structure of societies refers to the functional dependencies through which people are bound to each other in a very specific form as well as to constraints of interwovenness that under certain circumstances induce a change of dependencies and relationships in a particular direction. [\[#N8-pt1\]](#)
9. Elias assumes that this slow process usually takes three to five generations (see Elias 1996: 34). [\[#N9-pt1\]](#)
10. The current situation of the European Union as a new institution can serve here as a striking example. Although different individuals and groups of people in different European societies may vary in the manner and the degree of identification with this relatively new established unit of survival, it seems that on the whole, the national and regional survival units continue to enjoy the deepest emotional anchor with the majority of Europeans. The crisis of this institution mainly created by elites within a relatively short time, in this sense, is not only an economic but also an identity crisis. Out of this non-simultaneity of developments can be explained, among other things, why this institution is perceived by many Europeans as something alien, outside the scope of their identification (see Elias on the drag effect of national loyalties on the development of new survival units to unions of states). [\[#N10-pt1\]](#)
11. Valences are emotional needs of people which are aimed at bond and anchorage in other human beings or objects (see Elias 1978: 135). [\[#N11-pt1\]](#)
12. The term double-bind process refers to interconnectedness of the increasing threat-perception and increasing affectivity of thinking and acting of human beings: '[...] a high level of danger has its counterpart in a high emotional level of knowledge and thus also of thinking about this danger and

action in relation to that danger. A high fantasy-orientated perception of the dangers lead to the constant reproduction of the high level of danger and thus also to the reproduction of ways of thinking that are more fantasy oriented than reality congruent.' (Elias 1987b: 78). ↗[#N12-ptr1]

13. (<http://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article114488501/Mit-Orban-ist-Ungarn-zum-Flegel-der-EU-geworden.html> [<http://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article114488501/Mit-Orban-ist-Ungarn-zum-Flegel-der-EU-geworden.html>]). Processes on institutional de-democratisation manifest themselves, for example, in the gradual restriction of civil rights through the adoption of new laws by the state in favour of more 'security' in different democratic societies, particularly in the United States of America after 11 September 2001. The security organs of the state are gaining increasingly more control over the lives of citizens (see Karg 2003: 5–22). ↗[#N13-ptr1]
14. (<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/studie-europas-sehnsucht-nach-dem-starken-mann-1.1070820> [<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/studie-europas-sehnsucht-nach-dem-starken-mann-1.1070820>].) ↗[#N14-ptr1]
15. See the discussion of such dynamics in Stephen Mennell's book: *The American Civilizing Process*. ↗[#N15-ptr1]
16. See my comparative study on institutional de-democratisation processes as the consequence of lagging of patterns of feeling and behaviour of people concerned behind the newly created democratic institutions in Iran (1905–1925), Germany (1918–1933) and France (1848–1852). In particular, there are astonishing similarities between the seizure of power of Reza Khan in Iran 1925 in this period of development of Iranian society and the current de-democratisation processes taking place in Egyptian society under the ongoing hidden rule of General al-Sisi. ↗[#N16-ptr1]

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