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Alikhani, Behrouz

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Post-Democracy or Processes of De-Democratization? United States Case Study

Behrouz Alikhani *

Abstract: *»Postdemokratie oder Prozesse der Entdemokratisierung am Beispiel der USA«.* Colin Crouch has collected evidence to demonstrate how current democratic societies, with a new wave of economic liberalism in the past four decades, have entered a "post-democratic" era. He uses the formula of a parabolato highlight the structure of this long-term transformation. According to him, in the "post-democratic" period the democratic institutions still remain formally intact, but the political class has increasingly become more dependent on big corporations and financial institutions and less dependent on ordinary citizens. In this paper, I will try to integrate this concept of democracy in a process-sociological concept of democratization and de-democratization. It will be discussed why the second concept is more reality congruent than the less differentiated and static concept of "post-democracy." With the aid of this new process or figurational sociological concept, one is able to empirically investigate both processes of democratization and de-democratization. To conclude the paper, this new concept will be briefly applied to the ongoing political and social processes in the United States.

Keywords: Post-democracy, process- and figurational sociology, functional democratization and de-democratization, main axes of tension, Donald Trump, USA.

1. Introduction

Colin Crouch is a well-known British political scientist and sociologist who has investigated the current state of "democracy" in the setting of some western democratic societies. He has collected evidence to demonstrate how these societies, with a new wave of economic liberalism over the past four decades have reached a period that he calls "post-democratic." According to Crouch, this period is not structurally the same as the "pre-democratic" period; however, there are some similarities between them. He calls the direction of such developments parabolic:

* Behrouz Alikhani, Institute of Sociology, University of Münster, Scharnhorststraße 121, 48151 Münster, Germany; behrouz.alikhani@uni-muenster.de.

> If you trace the outline of a parabola, your pen passes one of the co-ordinates twice: going in towards the centre of the parabola, and then again at a different point on the way out. (Crouch 2004, 5)

The first point would separate the "pre-democratic" and "democratic" periods and the second would separate the "democratic" from "post-democratic" period. By using the formula of a parabola, Crouch tries to demonstrate the "complex characteristics" of this transformation (Crouch 2004, 19-20). The post-democratic period combines characteristics of both the democratic and pre-democratic periods as well as those unique to itself (Crouch 2004, 77). In the "post-democratic" period the democratic institutions remain formally intact, however, the politicians become more dependent on big corporations and financial institutions. At this stage of democracy, the politicians increasingly do not represent the interests of the ordinary people in their societies; they do, however, seem to increasingly represent the interests of a small group of business elite which is largely globally oriented. With the decline of the manual working class and the subsequent importance of global firms, a gap has emerged which has been filled by a new political class of business lobbyists. In this period, an overlapping network of advisers, consultants, and lobbyists play an increasingly crucial role in re-defining the interests of the corporations they represent as one of public interest. Liberal democracy as the dominant political model in the United States has also become the unquestioned model for a well-functioning democracy all over the globe (Crouch 2004, 10). The collapse of the Soviet Union quickened the pace of these transformations in the direction of a neoliberal social and political order. This, according to Crouch, is far from the ideals of the theorists of economic liberalism like Adam Smith and Friedrich von Hayek who would not have regarded the political role of large global corporations as consistent with their idea of the free market economy (Crouch 2004, 92).

Some of the major features of this period include the collapse of the labor unions as important modes of public representation in some democratic societies (such as the United States and Great Britain), the privatizing of state welfare programs and the commercialization of education and other public services. This has led to constantly growing numbers of politically apathetic, detached, passive, and disillusioned citizens who do not see any prospect of real political empowerment and influence, as was the case at the peak of the democratic period in the first three decades following the Second World War (Crouch 2004, 4). The role of citizens has been reduced to participation in local and national elections taking place once every few years, electoral participation often now stressed as the main form of participation (Crouch 2004, 3). Crouch traces back the rise of populist parties and politicians in these societies to the current critical state of democracies that are suffering from a lack of real democratic legitimacy. In the absence of the common objects of "positive collective identification," the disoriented "shapeless middle mass" is looking for new

collective identities. New populist parties and persons offer themselves as the only and the best alternative (Crouch 2004, 118).

The development toward the post-democratic stage began, according to Crouch, in the 1970s, via a decline in the traditional type of entrepreneurship based on the Fordist concept of mass production and mass consumption as well as the rise of the global firms listed in the stock market. The maximization of shareholder value became the most important aim in this new shareholder economy. This transition was accompanied by a rise of a new transnational financial capitalism. National states have been unable to control and regulate these large global corporations; as such, they are no longer subordinate to the authority of national states (Crouch 2004, 32).

According to Crouch, the de-regulation of global financial markets in the late 1980s was a consequence of this shift of power. A restricted and limited government has emerged within an unrestrained financial capitalist economy (Crouch 2004, 11). This was especially true in the case of social democratic parties in some Western European countries which contributed to cuts and reforms to state Welfare programs in order to adjust to the neoliberal global reality which was no longer democratic (Crouch 2004, 63). Crouch recognizes clear differences between this kind of economic liberalism and democracy:

> […] the more that the modalities of liberal politicking flourish while electoral democracy atrophies, the more vulnerable the latter becomes to distorting inequalities, and the weaker the democratic quality of the polity. (Crouch 2004, 3)

2. The Integration of Couch's Model of Post-Democracy into a Process-Oriented Model of Democratization and De-Democratization

In the following section, I am going to demonstrate how Crouch's rather ideal-typical and normative concept of "democracy" could be integrated into a more processual and analytical model of democratization and de-democratization. The latter model deals with concrete, measurable, and dynamic processes in both directions of democratization and de-democratization (Alikhani 2014). This model was first created based on a perception of Norbert Elias's theories of democratization and de-democratization carried out by Dawud Gholamasad in his studies on the socio- and psychogenesis of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (Gholamasad 1985). It has been developed further by the current author based on a comparative study on the empirical examples of institutional de-democratization in Iran in 1925, in Germany in 1933, and in France in 1852 (Alikahni 2012). According to this model, which distinguishes between functional, institutional, and habitual dimensions of democratization and de-democratization, the social processes do not necessarily take place in one direc-

tion. Indeed, under specific circumstances, counter-processes could gain the upper hand and social and political processes could become reversible (Elias 2009b, 4-8). The new manifestations of these counter-processes may differ in their form and appearance from the periods before, but they still share structural similarities (Elias 2008, 210). In this sense, speaking about three subsequent periods of democracy (pre-democratic, democratic, and post-democratic) in a static and linear way could be misleading and dealing with only the differences in appearance. In other words, with the concentration on differences in appearance Crouch neglects more or less the structural similarities between the two pre-democratic and post-democratic periods. Viewed in this light, terms such as "oligarchy," "corporatocracy," and "plutocracy" represent symbolically such structural similarities. The term "structure," here, refers to the power relationships of different groups in a society, spoken in a process-sociological language. The reason for this negligence by Crouch seems to be the lack of a differentiated concept of power.

3. A Reality Congruent Concept of Power

As mentioned previously, from a process- or figurational sociological point of view, structurally there is not a great difference between what Crouch describes as the "pre-democratic" and "post-democratic" period. A dynamic and process-oriented concept of power could help to overcome the rather static understanding of power and democracy by Colin Crouch. The word "power" is usually used as if it referred to an isolated object in a state of rest. Instead, from a process-sociological perspective, power is an attribute of relationships (Elias 1978, 116). Therefore, every relationship between human beings and groups of human beings is a power relationship. There are extraordinary theoretical and practical consequences if the concept of power were not to be used in a reified manner, but in conjunction with other words such as power resources, power differentials, power chances, power balances, power potentials, power distributions, power shifts, and power ratios. The sources of power could be different things within a society and do not necessarily have to be economic ones. Indeed, a monopoly over the sources of physical violence, over knowledge and orientation could be counted as other sources of power upon which an established group could try to exclude the outsiders (Elias 2008, 211). With the aid of this process-sociological concept of power, one is able to capture the processes elaborated by Crouch in a more nuanced fashion. It is possible to demonstrate not just the direction but also the "constancy of direction" of shifted power balances between different non-separable "sectors" and institutions in a society (Elias 2009b, 7). Based on this understanding of the concept of power, the direction of processes of democratization indicates the growing distribution of all available power resources between all members of a society. On the

contrary, processes of de-democratization could gain the upper hand if the power resources in a society become increasingly monopolized by a specific "sector" and institution or group of influential individuals. Both of these processes occur simultaneously in all societies. The question is the carriers, advocators, and supporters of which tendencies could gain the upper hand at the end: the processes of democratization or processes of de-democratization. According to Crouch, the monopolists in the economic "sector" have increasingly reached this position in comparison to other "sectors" and groups in democratic societies in the past four decades. In this sense, there are structurally few major differences between the symbolic representatives of terms such as "oligarchy," "corporatocracy," and "plutocracy" and between what Crouch calls "pre-democratic" and "post-democratic" periods (Freeland 2012, 6; Sachs 2012, 105-7; Phelps 2009, 403). By focusing on such structural similarities in terms of power relationships and by not being distracted by differences in appearances, it is more reality congruent to talk about processes of "functional de-democratization" (Mennell 2007, 311-4) which could lead to specific institutional manifestation. The current regulations created under the rule of Donald Trump could serve as an empirical example of ongoing institutionalization of processes of functional de-democratization in the United States, which will be explored in greater depth later in this paper. Promised tax cuts for the rich and the abolishment of health care for the poor represent, among other things, processes of institutionalization of long-term processes of functional de-democratization. This is carried out by a billionaire from the very same economic sector who is elected by a great number of ordinary US citizens as an alternative against an "establishment" which is perceived as not representing them anymore. In this paper, I will not write about the various groups and motivations which have contributed to the rise of a person like Donald Trump. I will just briefly put this rise within the context of relatively long-term processes of monopolization and concentration of economic and political power in the USA in the last few decades, conceptualized in this paper as processes of de-democratization.

4. The Functional Dimension of Processes of Democratization and De-Democratization

The functional dimension of processes of democratization and de-democratization refers to the shifting of the power balance in favor of previously excluded outsider groups in the course of the processes of democratization. These directed but blind and unplanned structural transformations increase the scope of action and decision-making of every individual. Such processes have been highlighted in the philosophical tradition by the static and reifying term "freedom." However, 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, places special emphasis on shifts in the balance of the scope for decisions and actions of individuals in different social functions and positions (Elias 1996, 69). The range of this scope extends or decreases depending on power relations of people in a "figuration" (Elias 2009a, 1-3). Moreover, it is in these terms neither a zero point nor an end point, as is implied by ideologically combative terms. The degree of this scope is always differentially limited and varies 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. The power structures between different groups and individuals in a "society" and the peculiarity of the functions that people have for each other are crucial for the extent of the scope of decision-making and of action of single individuals and groups (Elias 2001, 52). The scope of decision-making depends on their positions as well as the network of their functional dependencies. The limits of this scope are set by different social positions and functions occupied by other individuals and groups of individuals in a society. Norbert Elias coined the concept "functional democratization" in order to demonstrate the direction of social and political development from a hierarchically structured social and political order to a more even distribution of power resources within a group of human beings, called "society" (Elias 1978, 68; 1996, 30). In the course of such processes, the scope of action and decision-making of previously established groups and individuals will narrow, which simultaneously leads to the widening of the scope of action and decision-making of previously outsider groups and individuals.

The process-sociological notion of function is a concept of relationships. There are always functional interdependencies between individuals and groups of individuals in a society (Elias 1978, 67-70); these functions are both reciprocal and multi-polar. What is symbolically called "society" is, from this process-sociological point of view, nothing more than functional nexuses of interdependent people as individuals and groups. People or groups that have functions for each other exercise constraint over each other as well (Elias 1978, 78). The degree of functional democratization, in other words, the kind of distribution of decisive power and status resources differs, from society to society. In a particular society, this could simultaneously shift in different directions, depending on the direction of the shifting power balances of different groups and individuals. Human beings define – depending on their power balances – different functions as more important than others. For instance, in the middle ages the function of clerics as monopolizers of the means of orientation was perceived as indispensable for the society. Nowadays, in a functionally differentiated society other functions such as bankers are perceived as essential. Processes of functional democratization manifest themselves in a capitalist society, for instance, through the wage of carriers of different functions. In such societies,

one could say that the money acts as the main criteria through which to measure the importance of different functions.

5. The Main Axes of Tension in the Course of Functional Democratization Processes

Processes of functional democratization have been taking place along at least five "main axes of tension" (Elias 1996, 149). The emphasis on these axes of tension allows for a simpler and more vivid understanding of processes of functional democratization and de-democratization. In addition to the axes of tension between governed and governors – which is considered almost the only axis of tension by many "theories of democracy" (Cunningham 2002, 22-6) – processes of functional democratization 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 colonized and colonial societies, and further social formations (Gholamasad 1997, 365; Elias 1996, 25-6).[1] 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 the ruled are large, it appears to the rulers as if they exist 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 democratization, the rulers become increasingly more 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 becomes, even for the most gifted politicians, increasingly unclear. Rulers experience a steady decrease in their ability to steer and control social events, forced to exercise restraint to a far higher degree as a consequence of newly established social interweaving and bonds (Gholamasad 1999, 31). Throughout these changes, organizational forms of people could also transform both the rulers and the ruled, if the power shifts remain to some extent stable and permanent. This is regardless of whether the rulers identify this power shift early enough and accordingly give suitable answers, or do not perceive it and try to slow or block them. In the latter case, among other things, revolutions and

[1] The last axis of tension between "the former colonized and colonial societies" was added by Dawud Gholamasad. With the description of "further social formations" Norbert Elias left room for the introducing of further main axes of tension which could become activated in differently structured societies.

violent uprisings against the rulers could be two of the possible extreme reactions of excluded outsiders.

In the course of processes of functional democratization, the previously weaker outsider groups in turn gain more "chances of control and steering" over the behavior of the previously established and more powerful groups. The democratization of power relations between rulers and ruled, however, is, as mentioned, just one aspect of the democratization of the hierarchical order of a society toward a "socialization of monopolies of power and status" (Elias 2009c, 271). Additionally, in parallel to these transformations at the political level, the balance of power also changes between the established and the outsiders in favor of the latter on the other main axes of tensions as well.

6. The Concept of Functional De-Democratization: United States Case Study

Colin Crouch mainly investigates the relationship between only two main axes of tension in the course of democratization and de-democratization of a society, rulers and ruled, and entrepreneurs and laborers. He discovered that the rulers of democratic societies no longer represent the interests of the ruled as much as in the three decades following the Second World War, but increasingly the interests of big global firms (Crouch 2011, 95). On the other main axes of tension, Crouch still assesses the dominance of processes of functional democratization.

In a process-sociological language, one could conceptualize such processes as processes of functional as well as institutional de-democratization to the disadvantage of ordinary citizens on both of these axes. This is not only a diagnosis of Crouch, but also of many other social scientists, particularly addressing the US society:

> Multivariate analysis indicates that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence. (Gilens and Page 2014, 564)

Functionally, big global firms in a less regulated global economy have been able to monopolize more power resources so that the political elite are functionally more dependent on them than on ordinary citizens in their countries. A new wave of industrialization that has led to the increasing replacement of workers through new machines has also contributed to the concentration of wealth as a decisive power resource. A 2013 Oxford study estimated that 47 percent of US employment is at risk of being computerized (Frey and Osborne 2013, 38).

Since the concept of functional democratization refers to the more or less equal distribution of power chances between all individuals and groups and

their functions in a society, the concentration of power resources in the hands of a few individuals, corporations, and financial centers could be grasped as functional de-democratization. These are the reasons why in a less regulated capitalist social and political global order every "sector" more or less becomes dependent on the strong economic "sector." On both of these axes of tension, rulers and ruled and entrepreneurs and laborers, processes of functional and institutional de-democratization can be observed according to Colin Crouch, when translated into a process-sociological language. In other words, the equality of chances between individuals and groups in contemporary "democratic" societies has decreased in comparison to the three decades after the Second World War. This inequality has been growing both nationally as well as internationally: according to an Oxfam report in January 2016, the world's wealthiest 62 people own as much as the poorest half of the population. This figure is down from 388 individuals as recently as 2010 (Oxfam 2016, 2):

> The wealth of the richest 62 people has risen by 45% in the five years since 2010 – that's an increase of more than half a trillion dollars ($542bn), to $1.76 trillion. […] Meanwhile, the wealth of the bottom half fell by just over a trillion dollars in the same period – a drop of 38%. (ibid)

If in poorly regulated power relationships such as this, the scope of action and decision making of global firms and corporations increases in a society, simultaneously the scope of action and decision-making of the ordinary citizens will decrease (Elias 1978, 74). In this case, the power balance will shift in favor of just a handful of citizens – the so-called one percent – who could monopolize decisive political and economic power resources and exclude a greater number of people from these resources (Piketty and Saez 2003, 24). Structurally, this new social, economic, and political order has similarities with the "pre-democratic era." The economist Thomas Piketty draws in his latest book "Capital in the Twenty-First Century" clear parallels between the degree of social inequality in some European and US societies and the feudal era in Europe. He concludes that twenty-first-century capitalism is in the process of reverting to the patrimonial model of the eighteenth or early nineteenth century, when ownership of capital rested principally in the hands of a relatively few rich families (Mennell 2014):

> The general evolution is clear: bubbles aside, what we are witnessing is a strong comeback of private capital in the rich countries since 1970, or, to put it another way, the emergence of a new patrimonial capitalism. (Piketty 2014, 125)

Developments in the United States – due to their intensity and pace – could offer clear empirical evidence for such an assumption, which could also be observed in other democratic societies in different more and less moderate ways. In particular, since 1970 social inequality has dramatically been increasing in US society. In the middle of the 1970s, for instance, CEOs of major American companies received salaries of around thirty times the average wage; by 1990, that ratio had risen to about one hundred times; and in the first years

of the new century it had exploded to more than 350 times (Wilterdink 2016; Reich 2007, 108-9).

As governments have increasingly supported, in the name of "economic growth" and "trickle down economy," the interest of big corporations, processes of functional de-democratization could find manifestations at the institutional level as well. This manifestation could be, as mentioned, conceptualized as processes of "institutional de-democratization" (Gholamasad 1997, 370). In this respect, there are plenty of examples, based on which one could demonstrate the ongoing translation of economic power into political power and vice versa (Crouch 2011, 70). The laws around the decision of the Supreme Court in the United States on Citizen United in 2010 and the emerging Super PACs for financing elections are some indicators of the institutionalization of the encroaching of the influence of corporate economic power on the political decision-making in the currently politically, economically, and militarily most powerful country on the earth. Unlike traditional PACs, through Super PACs, funds can be raised from individuals, corporations, unions, and other groups without any legal limit on donation size (Gulati 2012, 411).

The United States demonstrates a leading role how and to what extent economic power can be translated into political power (Wilterdink 2016). Even amongst the political elite of established parties, such an institutionalization of the influence of the so-called economic "sector" on the political "sector" has been criticized. For instance, shortly after the "Citizen United" ruling Barack Obama expressed himself as being very critical:

> With its ruling today, the Supreme Court has given a green light to a new stampede of special interest money in our politics. It is a major victory for big oil, Wall Street banks, health insurance companies and the other powerful interests that marshal their power every day in Washington to drown out the voices of everyday Americans. (Brown 2016, 66-7)

Also the influential Republican Senator John McCain, co-crafter of the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, similarly expressed criticism about this decision by the Supreme Court:

> There is going to be, over time, a backlash. [...] when you see the amounts of union and corporate money that is going to go into political campaigns. (Tannahill, 2012, 173)

In an editorial statement in January 22, 2010, The *New York Times* opposed the decision of the Supreme Court and described this decision as a new "potent weapon" to use in influencing legislative decision making:

> The Supreme Court has handed lobbyists a new weapon. A lobbyist can now tell any elected official: if you vote wrong, my company, labor union or interest group will spend unlimited sums explicitly advertising against your re-election. (Lasser 2012, 191)

Both Stephen Mennell and Nico Wilterdink made use of the concept "functional de-democratization" to grasp the direction of such transformations in the US

society and politics. Mennell estimates a noticeable decrease in the degree of the functional democratization in the United States:

> As Stiglitz puts it, the American government in the past few decades became more and more a government "of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%" of the population that is at the top of the income and wealth distribution. In reference to Elias's notion of "functional democratisation", the whole process can be characterised as one of functional de-democratisation. (Mennell 2014)[2]

[2] Stephen Mennell describes Norbert Elias as an "optimist," because he equaled the "extension of the chains of global interdependencies" in the course of globalization with "functional democratization" and did not consider the possibility of the concentration of power and status resources by a few influential individuals and institutions (Mennell 2011, 30). In a paper published in Human Figurations, Cas Wouters criticizes this kind of understanding of the concept "functional de-democratization" (Wouters 2016). According to him, processes of functional democratization and de-democratization are only two "unintended side-effects" of long-term social differentiation and integration processes. Therefore, what is grasped as "functional de-democratization" is "integration conflicts and disintegration processes" or some kind of "side-effects" of the more dominant global functional differentiation in the direction of functional democratization, because "integration processes" always trigger "integration conflicts" (ibid.). Wouters by and large assesses a clear dominance of social equality in contrast to counter-processes of social inequality. The most important indicator to measure functional democratization seems to be for him the functional differentiation and the long-term global expanding and lengthening of the chains of interdependencies.
In doing so, Wouters does not seem to take into account current processes of monopolization and the concentration of decisive power resources by few individuals and institutions in the absence of regulatory mechanisms at national and global levels. For him processes and counter-processes seems to be ending in favor of processes of functional democratization, as counter-processes or processes of functional de-democratization are only "side-effects" of a greater and stronger processes of integration behind which, however, functional interdependencies are lagging temporarily. This seems to be, however, quite a linear and teleological understanding of Elias who always considered the reversibility of social and political processes, depending on the shifting of power balances between different involved groups with different interests and power potentials (Elias 2009, 4-8).
Processes of functional democratization contain, according to my own understanding of Elias, the equalization of power balances on all, "five main axes of tension," between governed and governors, men and women, parents and children, different ethnic and religious groups (Elias 1996, 149). Elias speaks in this context about the degree of functional democratization. The change of this degree depends on the power relations between the involved groups on all above mentioned, at least five "main axes of tension." In this sense, Wouters seems to neglect the close interconnectedness of the concept of power and function by Elias in his process-sociological reception of the concept of function. However, both terms "power" and "function" are for Elias concepts of relationships and thus very closely interrelated: „To put it at its simplest, one could say: when one person (or a group of persons) lacks something which another person or group has the power to withhold, the latter has a function for the former [...] People or groups which have functions for each other exercise constraint over each other" (Elias 1978, 78). "(...) 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).

Particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the United States political model has been taken as the leading model of democratization in different countries all over the globe. Actions such as tax cuts, extreme austerity measures, commercialization and privatization of the public sphere are very closely connected to this prevailing model of "democracy." Based on their global power position, the Unites States has also been able to determine their "neoliberal" social, economic, and political order as the global order with negative consequences for the whole world as Mennell highlights it:

> Ironically, the USA has become a model-setting elite for the whole world at a time when its popular egalitarianism represents a kind of false consciousness in a factually increasingly unequal society; when the USA may be undergoing a process of de-democratization; and when American misperceptions of the wider world, together with diminishing foresight by American governments, are becoming a serious problem in world politics. (Mennell 2009, 97)

According to this model of "democracy" any kind of regulation of the economic "sector" at the national and global level is perceived as intervening in the mechanisms of the free market, which should be regulated by itself, for itself. The pejorative word "socialism" in the United States has been used to brand any kind of intervention and regulation from "outside" (Bellah 1992, 113). Even after the financial crisis of 2008, despite the bailout of banks by different governments through the taxes of ordinary citizens, less regulation of financial markets could be nationally and, especially, globally enforced. The market-friendly nature of pre-crisis international financial regulation has not been overturned in a significant manner, as in particular the political and economic elites in the United States opposed the introduction of comprehensive regulations due to their domestic ideologies and interests (Helleiner 2014, 13).

Even minor steps such as promised bills of financial transaction tax could not be passed. Single nation states feel powerless against this global order, dictated in particular by various Republican and Democrat US governments over the past decades, and do not see any other option but to adapt repeatedly to this ecologically and socially unsustainable dominant global social, economic, and political order (Wilterdink 2000, 187-8). Out of fear of losing the investment of such extremely powerful global firms and financial centers, representatives of different governments compete in offering them even better conditions for either remaining in their countries or gaining further "investment":

To sum up, the extension of functional interdependencies in the course of economic globalization could, but does not necessarily lead to the increasing functional democratization. The most important question about the degree of functional democratization is how and to which extent decisive power and status resources are distributed between different involved groups on the above mentioned five "main axes of tension" in a society. The study of the long-term direction as well as constancy of direction of such processes is one of the main tasks of process-sociological investigations.

> Over the years, corporations have increasingly exploited that fear, creating a high-stakes bazaar where they pit local officials against one another to get the most lucrative packages. States compete with other states, cities compete with surrounding suburbs, and even small towns have entered the race with the goal of defeating their neighbors. (Story 2012)

The current protests against the institutionalization of this power shift in the form of global trade treaties could be interpreted as an indicator of the resistance of some groups of citizens in different democratized societies against such processes of monopolization and concentration of power resources. The delegitimization of governments perceived as the representatives of the economic elite could contribute to another dangerous dynamic which could contribute to even stronger processes of de-democratization at functional, habitual, and institutional levels. The rise of right-wing populist parties and movements in various democratic countries is, among other things, one answer to such injustice and economic insecurity as perceived by a great number of citizens involved in such fast-paced experienced processes (see Rommel 2017 in this HSR Special Issue for a case study of this phenomenon in Germany). The rather one-sided fast-paced economic globalization driven by the elite in different countries has not subsequently led to the integration of many people disintegrated from their older integrational units such as families, churches, or parties. This rise has a direct link to the above mentioned neoliberal global order. In times of refugee crises and mass immigrations, as direct consequences of such an economically driven global order, the scope of identification for many citizens in their privileged, wealthy countries will be increasingly to withdraw to their national borders. The coming possible social and ecological crisis could lead to new "refugee crises" as well as new "waves" of immigration which on their part could contribute to the further strengthening of right-wing alternatives in a dangerous vicious circle or a highly emotional "double-bind process."[3] In such times, it is not the increasing social inequalities between and within different countries, but the immigrants and refugees that are seen as the main problem and the real source of the threat. The mainstream media is also contributing to this shift of attention from one main axis of tension to the others through agenda-setting and framing of the public opinion. The close connection between these different main axes of tension does not find that much of attention there: interstate and international inequalities, wars,

[3] 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 leads 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 1987, 66).

and the climate change have direct links to the mass immigrations and refugee crisis.

Such anti-establishment tendencies have, for instance, strongly contributed recently to the presidency of Donald Trump in the United States. One could not explain these tendencies only as reactions of followers of Trump against a wide range of rapid "cultural" changes which seem to be eroding the basic values and customs of the US societies as some social scientists interpret it (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 29). One should put this "cultural backlash thesis" in the wider context of the shifts of power balances between different groups and individuals at the local, national, and global levels in the US society affected by strong processes of economic liberalization in the past couple of decades. This "drag effect of the social habitus" (Elias 2001, 211) of at least a great number of Trump supporters is partly due to the perceived (as well as real) economic insecurity in the past few decades in the United States. Therefore, it is more reality congruent to ask about the exact connection between the so-called "psychological factors" and changes in the "material life" of Americans during this time. Inglehart and Norris neglect this connection and highlight "cultural" developments more responsible for the emergence of Donald Trump (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 29-31). However, such a reductionism and the artificial separation of these different, but very closely interwoven levels of human existence in the explanation of new right-wing populist movements seem to still represent the ideological battles between the Cultural versus Marxist theories in the social sciences (Elias 2006, 279). The "identity" and the "social questions" are not separate from each other. Not just commitment to fight against "cultural factors" such as immigration laws, environmental protection, same sex marriage as well as gender and racial equality have been in the center of Donald Trump's political agenda. He also addresses the so-called "material needs" of his supporters, such as demands for the reduction of the influence of big corporations in politics, challenging the power of Wall Street, fighting social inequality in the United States as well as the prevention of the outsourcing of "American jobs" to foreign countries and immigrants within the US borders. The statements of Donald Trump and his administration's policies of "America first," "economic nationalism," and "make America great again" are essentially the integration of all these "material" and "immaterial" aspects under simple slogans.

7. Summary

In this paper, I tried to integrate Colin Crouch's concept of "post-democracy" into a process-sociological concept of democratization and de-democratization. With the aid of the second concept one is able to investigate empirically the direction and the constancy of direction of democratization and de-

democratization processes in different structured societies. This could be done beyond the current ideological, polarized, and static debates on "equalitarian" and "liberal" kind of "democracies." This new concept is developed based on diachronic and synchronic comparisons of changes of "power ratios" between different established and outsider groups in various more or less democratized societies. Dealing with structures, not just with forms and appearances lies at the core of this new concept (Alikhani 2012, 86).

Crouch discovers similarities between the two "pre-democratic" and "post-democratic" periods, but due to a lack of a relatively appropriate concept of power he differs structurally between these two distinct periods. Therefore, he is not able to describe the ongoing processes as processes of de-democratization due to changes of power balances between different groups (Crouch 2004, 51). In contrast to Crouch and from a process-sociological point of view, processes of democratization and de-democratization are processes and counter-processes taking place simultaneously. Each of these processes could become dominant according to the power ratios of the supporters and carriers of these different opposing tendencies. Struggle in both directions could go on, despite different power ratios of the involved groups and individuals. Therefore, it is more precise and nuanced to use processual and directional terms and discuss processes of democratization and de-democratization with a focus on the direction of changing of power structures. The term "parabolic return" as coined by Crouch could not cover these opposing, complementary processes (Crouch 2004, 22). "Pre-democratic" and "post-democratic" periods have structural similarities in terms of power relations between involved groups and individuals. In other words, the period which Crouch characterizes as post-democratic differs in its form and appearance from the pre-democratic period, but not in its power structure. In both periods, in the United States as well as in some other "democratic" societies, the balance of power and correspondingly the monopoly over decisive power and status resources have extremely shifted in favor of one small group and to the disadvantage of the majority of ordinary citizens. The sources of power can vary from society to society, but the processes of centralization and monopolization of power resources remains the same. In this case, one could claim that the economic "sector" has gradually gained more influence over other "sectors" in the past four decades in the course of economic liberalization in a one sided economic globalization. Within this "sector," few global corporations and financial centers could impact the course of political decision-making at national and global levels to their favor with enormous consequences for other "sectors" in these democratic societies. The United States offers a very clear example for the study of the degree of corporate influence on the political decision-making at various levels (Lessig 2011, 213-4; Drutman 2015, 55-7).

With the aid of this three-dimensional model of democratization and de-democratization, the rather static approach of Colin Crouch could also be overcome. Using concepts like "pre-democratic" and "post-democratic" forces Crouch to think in non-processual concepts which are reduced to the present time and do not lend themselves to the capacity of long-term investigations. The problem of using post-terms is in their deficiency in adequately describing those times after a post-phenomenon. Social and political developments will also take place in the future after a so-called post-period. This problem arises if one reduces long-term processes of democratization and de-democratization only to their present institutional and political dimension. Comparative studies could offer a better understanding of the degree of functional, habitual, and institutional democratization in different countries. Evidence, which Crouch extensively offers, could easily be integrated into a more differentiated processual approach, which has been offered in this paper.

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