

**POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY IN LIGHT OF GLOBALIZATION: NEW
PERSPECTIVES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

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In this essay, I examine political sociology under the light of the process of globalization and argue that it needs to change its focus and expanse to sustain itself in the new global society. I argue that political sociology as a field is marked by its own western traditional understanding of bases of power. I critically examine the three traditional approaches to understanding power in sociology: pluralism, elite theory and Marxist theory of power and points to the strength and weaknesses of each approach. I draw upon examples from politics in the Muslim world to point to the inability to a western centered political sociology to account for the religious basis of political power. The contemporary global politics, I argue, is held in the shadows of 1989, with the demise of Soviet Union and the consolidation of capitalism into one global system—and the resistance to this has increasingly become fragmented. For a fully rounded analysis of the contemporary political situation in the global society, political sociology will have to include new bases of power along with the historical conceptions and it will have to bridge its nation-centric concepts into more transnational concepts to capture changing nature of global politics.

The main question for political sociology is, as Harold Laswell has it, who gets what, when and how. This approach is different from political science approach because political sociology looks for the answers to these questions in the social formation, in social institutions that underpin both the social and the political. The contemporary global society is marked by a skewed distribution of resources and capabilities accorded to different groups in the world and therefore a skewed distribution of power and capacity. The contemporary global society is also a society in transition, in the sense that some fundamentals changes to the structure of world economy—namely, globalization—are leading to new developments that have not been the purview of political sociology as conceived at the time of bounded nation-state units, the hallmark of the times when political sociology came of age. It is important to remember that the field of political sociology as conceived in those times was also a product of a certain social and cultural milieu—which shows up in the importance accorded to topics that flow from the heart of European philosophy and history. Therefore I will argue here that the questions asked and the answers given also exhibit the limitations of these perspectives and the questions of power as conceived in political sociology leave out issues that arise in communal settings with religious centrality. Therefore, whether the ideas flow from pluralist, elite or Marxist approaches in political sociology, they contain within them limitations of their answers.

The contemporary global society is marked by a skewed distribution of economic resources. It is true that as compared to any other time in human history many more people are living on earth. It is also true that as compared to any other time in human history many more people are living longer and healthier lives. Yet it is also true that the level of economic inequality among different population groups is also bigger than any other time

in human history. The question of skewed distribution of economic and cultural resources in the language of political sociology is a question of who has power and how this power is exercised. Three different perspectives try to answer this question. The first perspective, the pluralist perspective, finds its origin in classical liberal ideas of Hobbes, J.S. Mills and Jeremy Bentham and in work of French aristocrat DeTocqueville. The liberal thought of Hobbes and Mills were concerned with protecting the rights of individuals in the context of English society of 17th and 18th century. For them it was individual liberty—defined in a narrow economic and individualistic basis—that was of foundational importance. Hobbes conceptualized the world in terms of a jungle where the only reason we do not cheat or hurt each other is because of the presence of the institution of state—the Leviathan. But then the problem becomes how to stop the state from taking over the whole sphere of existence. The economic activities in particular were held by the thinkers like Mills and Bentham—whose ideas Marx ridiculed as the view of the bourgeois of the market street—to be sacrosanct and therefore outside the purview of state. The truth is that liberalism in its own time was a revolutionary idea. The ending of royal privileges and the need for individual social dignity—although this for J.S. Mills did not include non-property owners and colonized people—was the goal. The goal was to dethrone the clerical authority. For Mills and Bentham the reason for the existence of human beings and the state was to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, the idea that is known as utilitarianism.

In the modern world, this notion of liberal idea of power came to be encapsulated in the form of pluralist perspective. With the royal privilege destroyed and the clericals in retreat, the freedom to undertake commerce became dominant and the pluralist perspective echoes the individualist, liberal ideas. For pluralists, the society is not dominated by any

one particular interest, but rather different people with similar interest come together and they play a part in the electoral process via which the ideas with most appeal to the populace gets into the government and therefore become applied to the society. For pluralists the process of elections as conceived in the present fashion is sufficient; power for them is not concentrated and is in fact dispersed throughout the society. DeTocqueville's construction of the local level of democracy among Americans in 1830s—as described in *Democracy in America*—who self-organized at local level and took initiative without any direction from government or any other centralizing authority, forms the basis of this model of power. The most famous statement of modern pluralist thought is found in Robert Dahl's work, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*, in which he studies the distribution of power in local politics in New Haven and argues that there had occurred in New Haven a historical shift from “a system of cumulative inequalities in political resources to a system of non cumulative or dispersed inequalities in political resources” (1961, 228). Pluralists extend this model to the polity at large and argue that there is no concentration of power.

They also downplay the role of state; for them the state in the shape a minority (*homo politicus* as Dahl had it) does not play an important role. Dahl terms most of the people in the society as *homo civicus*, people who do not have much interest in the political affairs. The people who have an active interest in politics are characterizes as *homo politicus*. The population therefore is divided into two strata: apolitical statrum and political stratum. It is the second stratum—which does not require any special qualification for entrance such as wealth and education, except for an interest in politics—that people in government are selected from. The state then is a democratic state in the sense that it is

elected by electoral process in which anyone can contend. People make the decisions and the words of Abraham Lincoln—“government of the people, by the people and for the people”—reflects the true nature of government. Democracy in this perception is defined as polyarchy, a system of limited democratic representation. For Dahl the idea of polyarchy is an improvement over the closed hegemonies of the authoritarian societies. William I. Robinson characterizes this notion as “low intensity democracy” since it is associated with democracy in a formal rather than substantive sense. The notion of civil society in this perspective is the font from where the ideas that find representation in state arise. The state is not partial to any interest; it floats over all interest and its actions and policies are reflective of what the people at large want. Class and social movements do not exist in this language, because if they were real issues they will find a voice in the electoral process.

To begin with, this model is an idealized model of American society. This model does not even attempt to give a prescription to the world outside the United States. There are those who argue that American society is an exceptional society and that there is no existence of the notion of class in the American society because it does not require the language of old world. It is a known fact that United States never had a strong socialist party and nor a strong socialist tradition. This for Seymour Martin Lipset had to with American exceptionalism in the sense that America never had a feudal background so Americans were born conservatives and as well the limitations put on government from the beginning made Americans gravitate towards libertarianism and anarchism ideas than socialism. There are things that are truly different about America, but pluralism as a model does not even do justice to capturing how power is exercised, let alone power on the global scale. The pluralist perspective applied to a global society will dictate that polyarchy is the

answer for different parts of the world. Anywhere there is electoral process, which is nominally free, we have a polyarchy—which is all fine and well with the American government and as well as with capitalists who want to consolidate the present distribution of power in the world: in favor of those with money and power and against those lacking either capital and power. William I. Robinson in his perceptive work, *Promoting Polyarchy*, argues that polyarchy as a political program has been adopted by American foreign policy on the behalf of promoting interest of global capitalist fraction of the capitalist class.

Pluralist's notion of power, that they say exists in the world, is not complete. This conception of power—defined by Dahl as “the ability of A to make B do what otherwise B will not do”—is a relational one, one that is visible in real world transactions. This model of power, as defined in this way, is focused on observable power—what Steven Lukes refers as one-dimensional notion of power. Lukes also points out that the one-dimensional power is about behavior of making policy decisions about conflict of (subjective) observable interests. This kind of focus on what would be a model of behaviorism—which neglects the black box of consciousness—is a reflection of the electoral process that is central to Dahl's model. As the United States preaches polyarchy to Middle East countries at this instance in global political situation—via its Greater Middle East Project—it is clear that they it does not want to let real substantive democracy come into play. Take, for example, of Egypt where supposedly American political pressure is bringing changes in the political structure. The supposed change that United States wants is the ability of different groups to be able to take part in elections and be able to get selected into government. So the visible conflict in the society is between Islamists and secularists (read American

favored)—but even when America is calling for changes in the political restructuring of Egypt, it is not asking for an open elections that will have the real conflicts of interests between the Mubarak regime and the Muslim brotherhood to come to the fore. While Mubarak has declared that he will allow other candidates to run against himself or the nominee of the ruling Nation Democratic Party nominee in the upcoming presidential elections this year, in fact the desire of the Mubarak regime and the American side is very clear in actions of the ground: Mubarak has accepted that other people will run against him in the elections but he has attached an onerous and insuperable condition. Any candidate who would want to run the elections will have to get the signature of 50 members of the parliament (All but 10-15 of whom happen to be from another party); this then blocks out any chance for a real possibility that someone from Muslim brotherhood will run in the elections. This is the kind of low intensity democracy that comes out of pluralist perspective. The real democratic choice in Egypt today will see Muslim brotherhood in power, but that is not acceptable to the superpower, because it will not be good for its interests.¹ Some of the recent examples of regime changes in places as diverse as Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and the failed regime change effort in Venezuela are examples of what a pluralist world order will want to achieve: formal elections which bring into power those who protect the regime of capital and the associated laws that insure that profits can be taken out and foreign investments allowed in a rationalized fashion.

The state-civil society relations implied by pluralism are also partial in truth. For this perspective the state is but the clear representative of the democratic interests of the populace. And civil society therefore is truly represented in the state, which implies that there should not be antagonistic relation between the government and the civil society. It

therefore makes no space for the social movements to in this equation. The only legitimate way of making one's voice heard is via organized lobby and pressure groups. In their reading, if people are not satisfied they can form a lobby or pressure group and influence the government. But for them there is no difference of a lobby group such as National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the Sierra club because each has an equal chance to be heard in the system. This, however, is patently false because the economic resources that a group such as NAM can bring to play are widely substantial from the resources that a group such as Sierra club can bring to play. Lastly, in relation to the differential economic resources, there is no sense of class differentials present in this perspective, which will be necessary to understand the contemporary global political and social situation. This then is a perspective that is very local to American society and it is even flawed when applied to that society.

The second perspective in political sociology that tries to answer the question of political power is the elite perspective. This perspective is based upon the work of Gaetano Mosca and Villfredo Pareto. Both these theorists held that societies are divided between elites and masses. This division comes from the differential abilities present in human beings. Those who end up elite have superior ability and those who remain in masses have lower abilities. These theorists point to the existence of a ruling group all through the human history as a factor supporting their theory. Pareto was so sure of his theory that he drew a curve that showed the distribution of elites and masses that parallel the curve of distribution of income among the population. Human nature, for these theorists, explains the persistence of elites and masses all through the history. Human nature for Pareto is an unchanging entity and therefore we have a universal presence of elites and masses

throughout human history. Pareto explained the persistence of this division in terms of irrational behavior of human psyche—in terms of “deep residues”. He divided the population into two groups: those with “instinct for combination” and those with “instinct for aggregates”. Those in the first group possess ability to make combinations and are cunning in their reason and they end up as elites. Those in second group are borne to resist change and have devotionism to stability. The combination of these two factors—the Machiavellian foxes and lions—keep society in stability. While the elite theorists are known for their critique of both liberal democracy and Marxism, one of them at least sees a limited role for liberal democracy. Mosca sees a limited liberal democracy as a mechanism for the circulation of elites since the elections will move those born in masses that have the ability of elite. This ‘circulation of elites’ will give the system an appearance of stability.

The second idea that is at the heart of elite perspective is that complex organization need leadership to insure effective functioning. In this context of work of Robert Michels in *Political Parties* put forward the “iron law of oligarchy”. For Michels, one “who says organization, says oligarchy” (1992: 364). Michels studied the German Social Democratic Party to see how he can explain the concentration of power in the hand of a few people. His intention was critical, but he came to the conclusion that any organization turns into an oligarchy because of the requirement of concentration of power in the hands of a small number of people—the elite—for effective running of any organization. This kind of idea is also entertained by Marxism, as can be seen from the Lenin’s idea of “dictatorship of proletariat” in *State and Revolution*, in which the working class is to be lead through the transition from capitalism to communism via the dictatorship of proletariat, which will wither away as people become prepared for communism. As from the case of Soviet Union,

this did not work as the dictatorship of proletariat become another kind of elite rule. Max Weber also drew attention to the process of bureaucratization that gets in the way of real democratic rule. For Weber, the only break out the “iron cage of bureaucracy” was to be provided by charismatic personality. In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Schumpeter also talks about democracy as a system that inevitably leads towards elite rule because it bureaucratizes the process of selection of leaders. The democratic process then become only a way for selecting as to who will rule them. The modern variant of the elite theory are found in the work of C. Wright Mills who in *Power Elite* argues that American society is ruled by elites from three different fields: military, corporate and political. Further work in Domhoff’s *Who Rules America? Power and Politics* continues Mills tradition of democratic elite theory but with an increasing focus on class.

The notion of notion of power in the elite perspective is identified with the second-dimension of power in Steven Lukes’ work, which assumes that there is a hierarchical relationship between groups in which the group in power is able to further its interest in not only the sense of the one dimension of power—that is by making an actor do something that the actor would not do otherwise—but also in the sense of being able to exercise political power by keeping certain issues off agenda. This perspective is identified with managerialism by Alford and Friedland in *Powers of Theory*, because it the power is concerned with the way structures of organization allow the exercise of power by elite. The power flows from the organization of structure via which decisions are made. In this sense the centralization and the institution of bureaucracy becomes a central point of exercise of power. The state then in this perspective is something that stands above the society to exercise in a non-partial manner that is for the good of the system. The bureaucrats in this

model have independence from the economic elites. Echoing Weber, there is not only one basis for the societal power. Class, which is understood in a different fashion than the Marxist notion of class, while an important factor is not the sole source of social power, and in addition to class, status and political party are other basis of power. The state in this system reflects two views: the sectional interest and structure of the interests of the dominant group—the elites—in the society and the functional interests of keeping the system going by making decisions that are important for the working of the system. Therefore the centralization and rationalization of the state are accompanied by the increasing coercive power of the elites against rebellious populations.

The nature of democracy in this perspective is limited to an understanding of democracy in which is understood as a result of elite competition. Further democracy is understood to keep the circulation of elites going and in some more generous version of this perspective—namely, Mosca—democracy is a way by which individuals born among the masses can rise to become part of elites. Democracy here works to co-opt the populace. The political imperative that marks this system is one of reform and reaction. It is no accident that most of the major figures of this perspective found attraction in fascism. Pareto was sympathetic to fascism and Michaels left socialism for the fascist work under Benetino Mussolini. The state and civil society relationship in this perspective are organized around interorganizational authority and conflict. The conflict is managed and resolved in this perspective and politics—which allows for the management of conflict—plays a central role in the worldview of this perspective. Given that the state is an autonomous entity in this perspective, the civil society and social movements do not get any importance, because the state can resolve the questions of importance without partiality to any one side.

This is an interesting perspective that works very well in some aspects on the global political situation today. The understanding of the growing role of state in surveillance and the control of human bodies can be understood via this perspective. This perspective also could be used to explain the persistence of inequality and evil in the world. It exists, because it is in human instincts to be unequal—and therefore those with ability can move up and become part of the elite and others will have to be content with being part of masses who will be looked after yet dictated to by state. There is a fundamental level of justification of inequality built into this system. At the national level, the absence of whole groups of peoples from the elite structures points to the problem with this perspective. For example, the lack of representation of minorities in the political power structure can be construed as if the whole of the population lacks in some of the capabilities that are needed in the elites. The elite perspective though if applied to the selection of ruling elites in the United States is not able to answer the question of whether it is possible for someone to be able to rise to a power of political prominence or even within the prominent political structure without a level of economic affluence? It seems as if anyone who runs in the elections has deep pockets. Another related question is whether the bureaucrats making decisions that are autonomous of the interests of the capitalists in their work? On this point, there are a number of instances where it could be argued that a managerial state makes decisions that seem to go against elite interests in the first instance. If elite perspective was the ruling paradigm in the world, the power hierarchy of the world would be made up of bureaucrats who made decisions about what the best way for maintaining the system—and this would have meant that there was more stability in the system. But as it will become clear from my discussion in the Marxist approach section below, the bureaucrats do have

some degree of autonomy but in the end the decisions are made by a fraction of populations that has clear relationship with the class structure.

The third approach to global political situation is the Marxist perspective in political sociology. The Marxist political sociology is based upon the work of Karl Marx who stressed that throughout the human history—except in the prehistoric times—there have always existed two classes of people, the oppressors and the oppressed. The oppressed are the ones who sell their capital to make a living and oppressors are the ones who own the means of production. Men make their own history but not the conditions of their own choosing—this sums up how Marx views the relationship of work to the making of history. The social conditions and relationships, according to this perspective, prevailing in a given society reflects its organization of the mode of production. Different modes of production represent different relationships: the feudal mode of production has the master-slave relationship and the capitalist mode of production has capitalist-workers relationship. In works such as *Capital* Marx worked out the centrality of labor to the production of profit under capitalism. For Marx, the organization of political life is to be understood in relation to the class relationship between its populations. Whenever the mode of production becomes more productive than the social organization that is present in the society, a revolution takes place and brings into being a new mode of society. For both Marx and Engels, as they argue in *The Communist Manifesto*, the history of all societies hitherto has been a history of class struggle and therefore under capitalism the struggle is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie's power over the proletariat is because of the formers control over the means of production (capital + factories).

The notion of power in Marxist approach flows from the control of economic resources. For Marx the economic differences within the civil society are manifest in the structure of state and the dominance in the realm of economic field implies dominance in the power in terms of state. Those who control capital in the society therefore also control the institution. In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx identifies the state as the “executive committee of the bourgeois”—that is, it serves the interests of capitalists in a very straightforward way. Anything that benefits capitalists gets done by the state and anything that benefits the working class is not done by the state of its own volition but is rather forced by the working class if they are strong enough. But it has also to be said that this is not the only way Marx understands state. There are other times in which he gives more leeway to the way state acts. I will return to this when we follow up the discussion on the nature of state in Marxist theory below. The notion of class in this approach is dependent upon the relationship with means of production and is therefore different from the notion of class in elite theory perspective in which it denotes an organized political entity. The economic bases of class are seen to cut through all different parts of social structure. The social structure is marked by the contradictions inherent in the struggle between capital accumulation and class struggle.

The notion of power—a structural one—implied by the Marxist theory is captured in the three-dimensional model of power as captured by Steven Lukes in *Power: A Radical View*. The third degree of power is concerned not solely with what is on the agenda as is the case with pluralist perspectives or as to what is kept off the agenda as is the case of elite theory, but it deals with the latent issues along with observable issues and also with how some potential issues are kept out of politics by sectional interests. In Gramsci’s work on

hegemony in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* he is concerned with how the working class—even though it is suffering from exploitation at the hands of the capitalists—does not revolt in keeping with Marx’s prediction of revolution. The answer for this for Gramsci is to be found in the way the civil society becomes the place where sectional interests are able to change the cultural modes of thinking via their deployment of hegemony eliciting mechanisms. According to Gramsci, hegemony—the consent to leadership by the capitalist class—is established not in the narrow repressive way but also in ideological way. So the state was not only involved in the establishment of hegemony in repressive terms but more importantly in the ideological sense. Therefore for the resistance to this the real stage will involve a war of position in the civil society, whose importance between state and economy was established by Gramsci within Marxists, and this will be a slow and long process, one that would need the involvement of organic intellectuals in creating alternative hegemony via cultural work. Gramsci is refreshing because he is saying that a society cannot be just changed by taking over the institution of state, as was the Lenin’s program in Soviet Union. In so doing, Gramsci lays the foundation for an alternative understanding of why the revolution did not happen in the advanced industrial revolution, which was Marx’s idea of how the transition from capitalism to communism will unfold. It is also important to realize here that this kind of work was later extended by the Frankfurt school scholars who centered culture in their analysis of capitalist societies. In recent times, the ideas of Robert Cox in *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*—who builds upon Gramsci’s work—are interesting because he argues for understanding power at the global level by examining the “state-civil society” complexes not only in a given nation, but in an international field of power in which some states have maximum degree of

external autonomy, and others are dominated by these states with maximum external autonomy.

The Marxist debates around the institution of state are perhaps the most important debates over the institution of state in any of these three approaches. Classical Marx's position—although he gave different stresses to it—was that state acted as the executive committee of the bourgeois. Therefore what was in the favor of the bourgeois was also in the favor of the state. But the debates between Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas were the modern markers in increasing the understanding the nature of state. For Miliband who follows the instrumentalist approach in *The State in Capitalist Society*—that is, the state is an instrument of capitalist power pure and simple—and therefore argues that all the actions taken by the state are in favor of the ruling class. But Nicos Poulantzas faults Miliband for thinking of the state as an 'empty space' and not as a social relationship. He argues that state has "relative autonomy" from the capitalist class and even though it the state might in the short term take act against what might be the interest of capitalist class in the last instance it will take the side of capitalist class. Fred Block in his article, "The Ruling Class Does Not Rule" argues that the state is not concerned with working for each single capitalist but that in fact the role of the state is to maximize the accumulation of profit and therefore not each single action in case of individual capitalist should be seen as a signification of state's intent.

The idea of democracy favored by this approach is also different from the other conceptions. The democracy here is not limited to the procedural and formal one or as something that is to be managed by the elites within a liberal democracy. The democracy in this approach is a real measure of economic as well as cultural equality for all the

populations. Democracy thus takes on the sphere of economy, state and the civil society. Marxists argue that for a democratic system we need to ensure that there is equal opportunity for the development of capacities of each individual from day one. There should be select few who can afford nice cars and schools from day one and others who cannot even afford to go to school. If only does the state provide free education for the children of the poor on par with the rich, argued Marxists, then only can we have a chance at a the establishment of a real democracy. But as studies such as Bourdieu's in *Distinction: A Social Critique of Value of Judgment* show, the markers of class are embedded within the family background so deep that the first institution of socialization—the family itself—cancels out the impact of equalization of education upon the possible establishment of a democratic education. The social movements that arouse out of the Marxist approach were class based and therefore they demanded actions to improve the economic and social position of workers. But since the defeat of the Soviet experiment, the labor movement the world over has suffered a strong blow.

The truth is the contemporary political situation in the world is marked by the shadows of 1989. The death of Soviet experiment in the graveyard of authoritarianism and the victory of capitalism marked the end of an era and the beginning of another. While Fukuyama wrote paeans to the victory of liberal democracy at the end of history, new rumblings were rising inside the very developments that were responsible for the fall of the Soviet Union. The world of today marked at it is by globalization is not the same which was analyzed by the classical perspectives of political sociology—pluralism, elite theory of class perspective. The rise of international trade and the corresponding need for a political structure that facilitates the process of trade and as well the movement of capital and goods

across nation-state boundaries has impacted the world political dynamics. The increasing importance of transnational institutions—such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), World Trade Organization (WTO), Group of Eight (G-8), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)—for political coordination of this system of increasing global trade has led to a focus on issues that cannot just be explained by reference to the notions of power and politics conceived in the political sociology literature. There is a need for a rethink in the basis concepts of political sociology. Since most of the concepts of political sociology come from the time when the world economy was divided into neat and bounded boxes of nation-states, the present conjuncture in the world political situation cannot be completely grasped by the concepts of political sociology.

Take, for instance, the concept of globalization and its impact upon the institution of state. There three four basic positions that can identified in the impact of globalization in the state. First, there are those who argue that the role of state is weakening under globalization and the importance of transnational institutions is increasing. This position has been called the hyperglobalist position, because it sees the role of nation-state as weakened and therefore it focuses on the transnational. As part of global capitalism school, William I. Robinson's work, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Classes and State in a Transnational World*, can be seen as a representation of this perspective. HE argues that "the apparent declining ability if national state to intervene in the process of capital accumulation and to determine economic policies reflects the newfound power that capital acquired over the nation-state and popular classes..." and that "real power in the global system is shifting to a transnational space that is not subject a 'national control'" (2004,

103). Others of view that the nation-state as being weakened by this perspective include Kenichi Ohmae, who argues that the “global civilization” will be the product of the changes brought about by globalization and that nation-state is history. Second, there are those who argue that the world has seen a higher level of globalization in the previous epoch and therefore the institution of nation-state is not weakening and in fact the process of globalization is being controlled and shaped by nation-state (Hirst and Thompson, 1996). This group is known as the skeptics. Third, the last group is made of those who are known as transformationalists who argue that the world is undergoing complex changes and although the role of nation-state is changing it is not yet okay to argue that its role has weakened. This position is present in the work of Bob Jessop, Held et al. My own position is somewhere in between the transformative and hyperglobalist position. Looking at the world, there is no doubt that the space for action that nation-state had in the past is now constrained. And yet it is also true that I see many obstacles in the path of construction of a transnational state that Robinson argues is in formation via the establishment of a transnational class. The myriad conflicts and the pull of the local in the conflicts world over give me a pause to think that the local will be strong force for quite a long time. Yet I am also very much open to the idea that there is indeed a global fragment in the capitalist class and that this fragment is increasing its power. The very sense in which capital has force over states world over—appearing as a magical force as if it does not have a source but is present everywhere—means that there is the domination of a globalization capital over states.

In terms of democracy, the political situation in the contemporary times is marked by the absence of any real representation by majority of populations in their own political

systems. In most of the western democracies, there is certainly a much higher level of formal democracy today than in the past. The level of political participation in formal elections is also healthy, with the sole exception of the United States where political participation at the national level are very low and political culture is heavily dominated by irrational elements. Outside the western world, formal democracy has spread via the third wave of democracy (Huntington, 1993). The biggest mark of this was the fall of Soviet Union and the conversion of the Eastern Europe to formal democracies in 1989. This then is the victory of capitalism that has made it possible for the capitalists to dominate the world political, economic and cultural scene like never before. The discourse of formal democracy has serviced the designs of the powerful countries and by extension the forces that stand behind these nations—the capitalist class. The United States' discourse of support for democracy is about extension of the market and its logic into all parts of the globe and into all facets of human life, without regard for popular democratic ideals. William I. Robinson's path breaking *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Interventionism and Hegemony* is the best work to capture the deployment of low intensity democracy for controlling the popular forces around the world. The low intensity is being used to make consumers of the people the world over, thereby superceding other more organic identities that people have. The invasion of Iraq and the gunboat democracy that we are seeing today shows the desperate nature of capitalist rule and its interest in consolidating formal democracy, which is integral to the capitalist system in our epoch. If one juxtaposes Venezuela next to the case of Iraq, one can really see the sordid nature of how capitalist power works. Despite coups and repeated attempts of overthrown Chavez,

the capitalist interests represented by the United States government cannot bring them to accept that Chavez has the popular support of a solid majority of Venezuelans.

The resistance to exploitation that is part and parcel of capitalism, nonetheless, continues. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 was blow to the social movements and class movements that opposed capitalism. The nature of protest and rebellion has changed in the world over. But there is no end of history yet, as protest, rebellion and politics has come back on agenda again. In terms of social movements, there has been a differentiation in the number and types of social movements active in the world. The social movements that held sway in the past, such as the class based movements have suffered a loss of strength in the aftermath of the Soviet demise. The rise of the new social movements in Europe in 1980s has centered the issue of culture. Whereas the social movements before 1980s were based mostly around the issues of class, the NSMs stressed the quality of life issues. In this way, a number of questions that were limited to the class dimension were reconfigured to become questions of quality of life questions and a number of other agendas that were not represented in the class movements were brought forth. Ronald Inglehart has suggested that the rise of movement like the NSMs (New Social Movements) signify the movement of societies to a set of post-material values, in that the ideas beyond material ideas—which guided the class based opposition to large number of people—have become central to populaces' life. This then shows up in their desire to think of politics in terms of quality of life issues rather than in material terms. This has meant proliferation of movements that range from identity-based movements to peace movements and the environmental movement. But the NSMs are movements that are more present in the advanced industrial countries than in the global south. There is still space in the global south for the kinds of

actions that are still concerned with the issues of material well being and economic justice. The rise of an energized global civil society has also made its mark on the global scene. The work of Keck and Sikkink in *Activists beyond Borders* and Jackie Smith in *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity Beyond State* shows the increasing engagement of global civil society with social justice issues beyond nation-state boundaries. The presence of diasporas—which lead to greater circulation of ideas and peoples across nation state boundaries—and the increasing migration levels point to the possibility of a stratum of population which can be concrete foundations of political action from below. At the same time the work of Michel Foucault gives us a moment for pause because it implies the pervasiveness of power in all sectors of human life. Power, in Foucault's use, is capillary type and it exists everywhere. So the focus on locating power in structures such as politics makes us neglect the presence of power at personal level. The failure of the Soviet Union can be read in these ideas as a problem that neglected the personal level of power in the process of revolutionary change.

To conclude, I began this essay arguing that the field of political sociology has its own lineage—a western one—and that therefore leads to its own strength and weakness in interpreting social world. I followed this by examining the three perspectives of political sociology—pluralism, elite theory and the class perspective—in terms of their understanding of the nature of power, state, class, democracy and civil society. I then critically examined these perspectives in relation to the contemporary global society. In the last section I gave an overview of the contemporary world situation in terms of power, state, class, democracy and civil society. I pointed out that the most important process that is influencing political sociology's understanding of world—and simultaneously raising

questions about the adequacy of political sociology concepts—is globalization. I want to conclude by looking forward at some of the challenging research directions that need to be undertaken in political sociology. First, if one were to begin from a macro perspective, then there is a need for a rethink of the fundamental understanding of power in political sociology. What other bases of power—such as religion—can be incorporated into political sociology more effectively to understand the world? Second, what needs to be done about political sociology concepts that are not really able to do justice to a global understanding of the world? To answer the first question, political sociology will have to look at the sources of power that are beyond what is examined in the field now—and to answer the second question, political sociologists need to look at new concepts that bridge the nation-state centered foundations with more global concepts.

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NOTES

¹ As a side note, this example also shows that the western understandings of power are not conducive to understanding the appeal of Muslim brotherhood in the area. Even though most people in Egypt understand that for development they have to elect people who are friendly with western government, still they stand behind the Muslim brotherhood because for them this is an issue of dignity. The whole of Egyptian brotherhood is a product of Muslim intellectuals struggle with the western colonial dominance in the region and the brotherhood is based on the ideologies of Al-Banna and they believe that they have to return to Islam for finding their way in the modern world. It has also to be said that Islam is very compatible with capitalism as Marxist orientalist Maxine Rodinson has argued in his books. Prophet Mohammed, after all, was a merchant and he took camel caravans on trade trips.