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Power, Welfare and Democracy: What Should the Major Priorities in Research?¹

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ABSTRACT

Given the complexity of democratization process in Indonesia, high profile and critically designed researches are in need to ensure that it doesn't miss the critical issue at stake. This article explains the importance of uncovering power relation as well as welfare creation and distribution embedded within the process of democratization. The finding would be useful to set up a country specific scheme of democracy assessment as well as model to equip democratization in the country.

At both theoretical and practical levels, the idea of democracy contains a degree of complexity, and hence, subject to an endless contestation. Nonetheless, in the line of human history, a number of economically developed and politically influential countries have been successful in bringing the idea in daily practice.³ Democracy has become their fundamental value, and it even being applied internationally as a standard of governance.⁴ In this regard, the late comer democracies have an

¹ Presented at the Panel on 'Indonesian democracy in comparative perspective': WHITHER DEMOCRACY? INDONESIA IN COMPARATIVE and HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE, Euroseas Conference, University of Gothenburgh, 26-28 August 2010.

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³ Barry K. Gills, "Democratizing Globalization and Globalizing Democracy", *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 2002; 581, 158. See also, Henry Teune; "Global Democracy", *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 2002; 581; 22.

⁴ Eleanor Chelimsky, "A Clash of Cultures Improving the "Fit" Between Evaluative Independence and the Political Requirements of a Democratic Society", *American Journal of Evaluation*, Volume 29 Number 4 December 2008 400-415.

opportunity to draw important lessons from the well established one. Nonetheless, setting them self against other country's standard is not fair and even widening the risk to fail. After all, democratization take place in their owned country, and the progress in democratization depend on their own setting.⁵

Indonesia is one among other countries which attempt to upgrade its status as a late coming democracy. For some reasons, Indonesia's democratization has been overshadowed by the well-established democracies. It obsesses with the question of 'what to be achieved' (given the apparent standards or practices derived the experience of the well-established democracy) and less concerned with the question of 'how to start with'. Desperation to comply with international standard, if not the lack of courage to challenge it, has set itself to be judged from externally-derived standard. This is particularly so, as democracy is understood simply as compliance to set of norms which have been practiced in the well-developed democracies. There is no incentive to properly understand the internally-induced problems. This is the point where series of serious and thorough researches are important. Apart from the predominating researches which judge Indonesia from a particular set of standard, Indonesia call for researches which, in practical sense, be able to assist the participating actors to solve their problems while encourage them to adopt democracy as guiding principle. After all, democracy is a matter of practicing set of values in the real live, to solve everybody's problems.⁶

This article aims to outline priority research for assisting process of democratization in Indonesia. What really important in this regard is not merely setting research topic but also type or the way conducting research. For this reason, we should start by discussing democracy inducing research.

1. DEMOCRACY-INDUCING RESEARCHES.

Corporate equips their attempt to achieving their missions by carrying out operation research, but democratization in Indonesia—which deals with wider range of collective mission—has not been systematically relying on research finding and recommendation. Actually, peaces meal attempts to do so have been sought by international funding agencies in collaboration with either university-based or NGO-based researchers. Their research findings mostly are dedicated for agenda setting. Suppose their findings are unquestionable, they are not well consolidated to match the scale of the problem. They are unlikely effective in directing or enhancing the entire process of democratization.

The bottom line is that, research community in the country has underestimates the importance of research in facilitating democratization. According the mainstream

⁵ Katharine N. Rankin, "Anthropologies and geographies of globalization", *Progress in Human Geography* 27,6 (2003) pp. 708-734.

⁶ Hauke Brunkhorst, "Globalising Democracy Without a State: Weak Public, Strong Public, Global Constitutionalism", *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 2002; 31; 675.

academic standard, researches are meant to contribute to knowledge development (if not specifically devoted for theoretical building). Even if practical research or problem-solving researches are conducted, researches have no control in implementing them. This is ironic because, researchers are critical element of the society who has access to specifically shape the agenda setting of democratization.⁷

The set of ideas, which then manifest in various policy documents devoted for democratizing Indonesia, was promoted by a thin layer of intellectuals, including researchers. Given the fact the mainstream standard of research is not devoted to political exercise, the design of democratization has not been developed through research. The prevailing rule of the thumb—good research does not play politics—justify that attitude. In the absence of democracy-inducing research, the direction and the pace of democratization are left to the politicians. For them, what really at stick is not the survive of democracy. To them, what really matter is to win or uphold public office.

It has been widely known that democratization is framed by a particular academic discourse.⁸ Researchers are the main actors within the domain of discursive politics. Hence, discursive engagement is not only inevitable but also important requirement for democratization.⁹ Series of research are needed to lay the ground for engaging in counter discourse on democracy, this is impossible in the absence of researcher's discursive politics.¹⁰ Research-based advocacy is important but missing element of democratization in Indonesia, except for limited numbers of people who happened to access the process.

Discourse is software for consolidating political practices.¹¹ Suspicion on the withering of democracy in Indonesia is easily understood given the values embodied within the idea of democracy appears to only shallowly manifests in the day to day public discourse. Such a suspicion is justifiable if it turned out that people feel that they have nothing to do with democracy, and their daily life has nothing to do with it either. If that is the case, we can specify the types of research that Indonesia bound to have.

First, it is series of research which is powerful and credible enough to raise and reshape public discourse on democracy.¹² This type research resemble to the idea of

⁷ Steven Brint, "Rethinking the Policy Influence of Experts: From General Characterizations to Analysis of Variation", *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1990.

⁸ James Tully, "Approaches To Recognition, Power, And Dialogue", *Political Theory*, 2004; 32; 855.

⁹ Eva Erman, "Conflict and Universal Moral Theory From Reasonableness to Reason-Giving", *Political Theory*, Volume 35 Number 5, October 2007 598-623.

¹⁰ Molly Cochran, "A Democratic Critique of Cosmopolitan Democracy: Pragmatism from the Bottom-Up", *European Journal of International Relations* 2002; 8; 517.

¹¹ John S. Dryzek, "Democratization as Deliberative Capacity Building", *Comparative Political Studies*, Volume 42 Number 11, November 2009 1379-1402.

¹² Martin Leet, "Democracy and the individual Deliberative and existential negotiations", *Philosophy Social Criticism* 2003; 29; 681.

basic research which questioned fundamental but simple elements embodied within the idea of democracy and democratization. Research of this kind is terribly important for the following need, that are: (1) to verify whether or not the working assumption of democracy and democratization are confirmed, (2) to trace and anticipate the underlying factors and process of democratization, (3) to check the pace and the direction of the process.

Secondly, research on micro or detailed level of democratization which is carried out in their day to day activities. The most important condition, in this regard is that, the research is dedicated to produces real effect to the resource persons. In other words, what democratization in Indonesia really in need are advocacy-based types of research. This only feasible only if the mainstream of research standard—which in essence is positivistic—is altered. Non-positivistic standard are equally scientific, and research community need to know it. If they choose to works along the non-positivist standard, they should have equal treatment.

Thirdly, research devoted for contextual mapping. Based on conviction that democracy is exercise of real live of the real people, sufficient understanding of the context of democratization is not least important than to understand what democracy is really means. In this regard, over generalization would be counter-productive. Given the diversity that Indonesia endowed with, mapping variety of context is important.

Those three types of research should be complementary. They serve as basis for knowledge-based movement which is critically important but not readily available to enhance the existing democratic movement in Indonesia. Contextual discursive process would arguably, allows clearer and more manageable process of democratization in Indonesia.

2. MISJUDGE THE PROCESS.

In the absence of discursive capacity, people in the democratizing countries are merely implementing agents, while democracy becomes un-negotiated political norms. They don't have enough room to negotiate even in terms of how to make democracy meaningful to them self. This section explains why is that so, and then elaborate the embed issue that research on democracy has to seriously take into account.

In the currently globalized era, where the well established democracy are culturally predominating and economical influential, the late coming democracies found themselves merely as locus bring about a kind of international set up. The well established countries have set themselves up as primary reference for democratization in other parts of the world. Democratization, in this regards, turns out to be a global political agenda, and the so called undemocratic country become political target of the global project. In this context, undemocratic countries are bound to comply with set of norms of democracy. Democratization eventually is a matter of putting in place a set

of norms regardless the setting. The lack of competence to participate in international discourse simply make the hegemony of particular model of democracy is unquestioned. This leads to the tendency of pursuing democratization merely as applying a set of international standard, while the late coming democracy has no role in setting up such a standard.

The mainstream approach to democratization, at least in Indonesia context, has been highly normative. In a way, normative approach to democratization has no mercy to those who live in democratizing countries in the sense that, they suppose to follow the given norms regardless of their situation. In line with choice theory believers, all actors behave rationally in response to the imposition of norm. If the imposed norms are found to be difficult to comply with, to cheat might be the best option. In a particular context where democracy is not genuinely driven by internal initiatives and motif, the best way to cheat the imposed norms is to pretend that they are compliant, but such compliance actually was merely a tactic repression. They keep pursuing their interest along the way.

The set of norms, which determines what to be done, has been reproduced within the mainstream discourse on democracy and democratization. Such a normative approach to democratization has gone unnoticed by the public, given the enthusiasm to bring the idea of democracy into daily life. The discourse actually retains some contradictions, yet not many people specifically point them.

Pursuing democratization along that line of thinking is undemocratic. Within that line of thinking, the supposedly active citizen or demos is entrapped with set of norms which, they do not necessarily agree on. In Indonesian context, democratization proceeds through a top down mechanism. On the name of democratization, a process of formulating and enacting law took place and process of implementation then come to follow. In other words, democratization is treated as a normal package of policy-making, equivalent to poverty reduction or public service improvement.

To imagine democratization merely as a matter of state's exercise in formulating and implementing a specific policy package is deceiving. Why is that so? Democratization is a matter of transforming the state.¹³ Democracy should manifest in the way the state dealing with policy on any subject. Obviously, by pretending that democracy is regular package of policy-making, the power holders easily deceive international audience, as if democratization process takes place, and at the same time resisting any attempt to alter the existing power relationship.

Apparently, democratization has to take into account the prevailing conflict of interest. It mean, research of democratization in Indonesia needs to take this into account. It is not merely to deal with conflicts of interests among those who have some things at stake, but also conflict among the prevailing norms. In many occasions, it involves conflict between the existing norms which govern the

¹³ Stephen R. Barley, "Corporations, Democracy, and the Public Good", *Journal of Management Inquiry* 2007; 16; 201.

prevailing way of life with that which are derived from interpretation of democracy. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that each competing parties advocating and defending particular set of norms on the basis of their political power. Simply put, democratization is complicated process of settling various facets of conflicts.¹⁴ Inability to make a fundamental settlement would, inevitably led the withdrawal from previous consensus which eventually allows democracy wither away. In this regard research to map out layers embedded conflicts within along the process of democratization is crucial.

The significance of the research is dependent on it accuracy in identify the root cause(s) of the withering of democracy. Given the diversity of context upon which democratization takes place, the research should be context specific. The blooming of democratic system presumably is the consequence of the success of the participating actors in practicing the prevailing norms and rules in accordance to that of democracy. The failure to settled conflicting fundamental norms is not easily anticipated by anyone, and speedy process of decentralization would potentially overstate success on it. Drastic process of democratization potentially hides fundamental conflict. It would come to the surface until someone blows it up.

The slippery process in identifying the root causes of to understand how democratic system to come about. Research on democratization in Indonesia requires serious and thorough effort on this issue. People are typically assumes that democracy is system in its own. This might be so if we carelessly assume that democracy is mere a set of norms. In practical sense, system is the one which are missing. In the daily life, there are so many systems already in operation. Unfortunately, those who comply with the prevailing system are not necessary aware of the very system. In Indonesia, the elite and the masses in each place are establishing certain roles and rules, known as paternalism. Despite the fact that paternalism patronages take place, patrons are not necessarily aware it name. They nonetheless the elite are fully aware of their duty to their clients. On the other hand, those who are in the position as clients what they can get from the elite. The system does exist as elite engages in a mutually beneficial relationship with their clients. The elite are responsible in providing protections to the clients, and in return the client serves the elite with loyalty.

The research should carefully address this issue. Patronage is one among many other systems empirically functional within the process of democratization. The challenge of democratization is to explain and at the same time manage how the competing systems are transformed into one new system we call democracy. In this regard it is unrealistic to expect that democratization make a linier progressive with no disturbance or surprise. Democratic order is easily wither away as the failing system disturbs the existing set of norms and power structure. The seemingly well accepted norms, such as election for public office, could easily trigger power structure. In a society where patronage is a way of dealing with public affairs, general election easily

¹⁴Alberto Melucci and Leonardo Avritzer, "Complexity, cultural pluralism and democracy: collective action inthe public space", *Social Science Information*, 2000; 39; 507.

transform itself into competition among political patron. Moreover, the election would then responsible to empower one patron against the other, as the winning patron eventually extends their relative position against other patrons during his/her terms in office. In this regard, general election fails to serve its role as instrument for democratization. It even jeopardizes it.

Those who approach democratization from normative point of view would be in trouble to accept the fact that election serves as a mean for empowering paternalism. Obviously, normative approach to democratization is inadequate because what really matter is not only the norm, but the context upon which the norms are applied. In democratization, context does matter. Moreover, process of democratization should depart from real socio-cultural as well as political context. The research should be wise in treating paternalism.

In a fragmented society where the state's power is not well institutionalized yet, the process of democratization essentially is to solve puzzle on how to define and relate 'unit' with 'unity'. This is very crucial research issue. Prior to explaining this point, it is important to bear in mind that Indonesia is a weak or a soft state. Most of the time, it fails to implement its own policy. It has no empirical evidence to convince every social group in the country that each state agency is equipped with reliable instruments in solving public interest. The fact that the state endowed with resources has allowed each unit to treat the state as arena for exploiting public resources. Prolonged authoritarianism apparently fails to establish a sense of unity which surpasses partial interest of their units. There is no evident to suggest the reverse that, leaving the matter to market mechanism, would resolve the problem. The point I want to make is that the critical issue that democratization process in Indonesia very likely to miss is the development of the sense of public among the individuals, especially those who are powerful enough to take advantage from collective measure. Research on democratization in Indonesia cannot afford to fail.

3. UNCOVERING HIDDEN DYNAMICS:

POWER RELATIONSHIP AND WELFARE-MAKING

This paper is written as part of an on-going project, and therefore, it is providing a brief information is appropriate. Having said so, this section will uncover how the project aims to uncover the underlying dynamics of democratization in Indonesia.

a. Initiatives: Power, Welfare and Democracy Project.

Driven by reflection presented in the previous section, *Universitas Gadjah Mada*, particularly Faculty of Social and Political Science, initiated a project. It aims to establish a strong network of research-based advocacy by attempting to link democracy with its understudies aspect, namely power relationship and welfare

making. The idea of welfare making includes welfare creation and distribution. The project is known as, Power, Welfare and Democracy (PWD).

In particular, the project aims to fill vital gap of democratic movement in Indonesia by the way of consolidating epistemic community at both national and international arena. This endeavour would not alter its identity as academic institution. But its attempt to induce and reproduce research-based advocacy through this project, will hopefully make the university improve its relevance to the public. Moreover, by doing so, the institution aims to take part in developing context-based understanding and theory of democracy, and share them with international community.

The activities would be consolidating research-based political activism to stimulate discursive public engagements, upon which, conceptual and methodological problems encountered along the process of democratization would be uncovered. At the current stage, the project aims to consolidate research agenda as well as research capacity at both national as well as trans-national level, which eventually equips the public in general, and the policy-makers in particular, with capacity to draw lesson from their success and failure in the past.

In the light of assertion that democracy Indonesia is withering away, academic community make a practical response through their daily activities, namely teaching and research. By doing so, practical solutions for bringing about democracy into the daily life are derived. Networking is important element of the project. The long term commitment to democracy by making and consolidating the best use of research would eventually allow Indonesia to improve public competence in discursive engagement on democracy. This serves as a safe guard for ensuring public substantially engage in democracy.

b. Uncovering the Underlying Dynamics.

This paper suggests that major research on democratization in Indonesia need to be devoted to uncover the underlying dynamics of it. The question then, is how to figure out the underlying dynamics of democratization in the country. In response to this question, we need to bring together all of the scattered ideas presented in the earlier section.

Democratization is a system-transforming process, within which, no one have full control in the entire process. It involves problems of collective actions known in the theory of rational choice. Any change made by anyone provides opportunity to alter anyone choice, either to support or to prevent change. In other words, process of democratization essentially is beyond planning. At its very best, it involves simultaneous plans within which failure of plan can mean success of other. In other words, if we observe at individual level, the dynamic of democratization is too difficult to comprehend. This, nonetheless, reveal an important fact that within the process power relations are always at play. Each actor pursues their own interests for the sake of their own welfare.

We can simplify the complexity by asserting that democratization involves a constant power game, and the style of the game is shaped by the prevailing power structure. Unaltered power structure would eventually counterweight initiatives previously made. Progress in installing serious of procedural arrangement, for example, is easily neutralized by those who in the position dominating power structure. Many people might exited by achievement in terms of procedural democracy but they eventually have to accept that the procedure does not make fundamental change in terms of collective nurture of the idea of democracy.

Not every power relationship is explicitly understood as political power. For lay persons, control of huge amount of information and money, is not been seen as political practice. In practical terms, however, money and information are effectively determining political decision. For this reason, this article suggests that at the early process of uncovering the dynamics beneath the process of democratization, we can focus on strategic issue of the daily life activities, namely welfare making which include the notion of welfare creation as well as welfare distribution. Welfare making in this regard, involve a certain degree of power game.

Attempt to uncover the underlying dynamics of democratization shall begin from uncovering how dual expression of power relation. The first is the expression power relation in public office, while the second is that within welfare-making. The rule of the thumb is that democratization is progressing in so far as it creates a situation where the rulers are kept under control by other, and at the same time, process of welfare-making reinforces the control.

c. Democracy as Public-Securing Power Relationship.

As the earlier section suggested, research for uncovering power relations embedded within the process of democratization should address the issue of governing the public. Democracy implies particular set of power relations, and democratization inevitably dismantles the prevailing power relationships. In this regard, any attempt to democratize mean altering power relation and this could be better in securing public interest or conversely jeopardize it.

The earlier studies indicated that there are at least three types of power relationships. They are different in terms of how to deal with public, or at least, collective interests. The difference of each is the following.

(1) The vertical power relation.¹⁵

- This type of power relation has been widely recognized as the way the state is working. For this reason, vertical power relation is also known as *statism*. It is important to distinguish it from state or bureaucracy as organization.¹⁶

¹⁵ Colin Crough, "Markets and States", in Keith Nash and Alan Scott (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2001.

¹⁶ Mark Neocleous, *Imagining the state*, Open University Press, Berkshire, 2003

- The key the power relationship is the use of authority and compliance to it. Public is served by making the authority knowledgeable and then capable of pursuing public interest by demanding compliance to the idea. The challenge in relying vertical power relationship is to make sure that the top level devoted its authority for the interest of the public.
- The exercise of *statism* could take place beyond the institution of the state itself, yet typically power relation is apparent. It asserts authority and demand compliance in order to pursue a particular goal.

(2) Horizontally functioning power relation.

- Unlike *statism* which obsessed with the use of authority along the line of hierarchically orders institution, this power relation relies on the notion of consensus or transaction among those in somewhat equal position. It involves consensus seeking through voluntary exchange, widely known as market mechanism.
- The mechanism indeed widely applied by corporate or business community. Nonetheless market mechanism could be used by those who work within the domain of the state.

(3) Mixture of vertical and horizontal relationship.

- It makes use of hierarchy but that authoritative as the way the state apparatus typically does. It also work on the basis of voluntary exchange, but their ultimate motive is not to gain profit. The key to its function is managing solidarity and intimacy. Managerial exercise allows this power relationship to function in serving, and to some extent also taking over, the traditional role of both the state and the market.

These three types of power relation is brought forward as entry point to search the underlying dynamic of democratization. In most of the occasion, they are coincide and to some extent complicates each other. This means, they are potentially altering during the process of democratization.

Researching on the way these modes of power relationships are functioning in serving the public is important in order to understand the power-based of those who are participating in democratization. Research on how these modes of power relations simultaneously in producing public goods are even more important to do. Arguably, the failure to produce democratic political order is rooted from the inability to set up mutually enhancing mode of power relationship. Bearing this in mind, a series of democracy assessment which are sensitive to various facets of the prevailing power relationship is badly needed. Presumably, this is the way to understand the roots cause of withering away of democracy in the country.

d. Democracy: Welfare-Making Process.

Research on welfare-enhancing process within the process of democratization is unpopular for some who define democracy merely as establishing certain set of procedure. For them, democracy has nothing to do with welfare-making.

For decades, relationship between democratization and economic development has been debated. Yet the debates are devoted more on theoretical development rather than for easing democratization process. Reviving debate on this issue is important given the fact that, within the mind of the public, democracy merely is a means for securing a particular mode of welfare accumulation and distribution. For this reason, the research priority of the PWD project to include, but not limited on:

- (1) Mapping out the existing modes of welfare accumulation and welfare distribution to exist in the country. There are different modes, in terms of capacity, scale, key actors and so on. In terms of the way it operates, it is important to bear in mind that the mapping should be sensitive to the prevailing power relationship.
- (2) Assessing how each mode actually leads or hampers process of democratization.

4. CONCLUSION.

Given the contingency of research agenda embedded within the process of decentralization, specifying research topic (especially the sort terms agenda) is too risky. The only research priority proposed from this study should be well consolidated as integrated part of democratic movement. Phenomena which people call wither democracy, in this regard is assumed to be the consequence of the missing element of democracy movement, which dragged by contextually-detached discourse. Networking of researchers interested to learn from democracy in the making, is vital.

There would be endless agenda for research, but this article proposes an entry point the existing stage of democratization in Indonesia. It basically uncover power relation which closely tight to welfare creation and welfare distribution. The power manifest in different way, but the current typology of power relation potentially lead to exiting new understanding.*