TO CONSOLIDATE OR UNCONSOLIDATE: A NON-WESTERN APPRAISAL OF
THEORY OF
DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

by

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IN PROGRESS

Abstract

O’Donnell (1996) noted that it is strange that many democracies born out of the Third
Wave remain in an unconsolidated state for two decades. These states generally come
from a non-Western background and simultaneously engage in nation- and democratic
construction. This paper will conduct a meta-theoretical appraisal of democratic
consolidation theory in order to determine how applicable theories of democratic
consolidation are in a non-Western context. The paper departs from the view that there
is not a one-size-fits-all approach in democratic consolidation. Mainstream democratic
consolidation theory, however, has operated from a presumed universality of
democracy, but failed to take into account the various democratic realities in the world.

Introduction

Metatheory is understood as a “…set of interlocking rules, principles, or a story
(narrative), that both describes and prescribes what is acceptable and unacceptable as
theory…” (Overton, 1998: 1). Moshman (1979: 59) states that

“…theories are not pre-existent in the world, waiting to be ‘gotten’. Rather they
must be constructed, tested, reformulated, and perhaps eventually replaced, a
process that may be referred to as theorising, in a very broad sense of the

1 This paper is based on my doctoral thesis entitled Theory Building and Democracy: An analysis and
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word…content of individual knowledge of their environments changes with age but so does the nature of their theorising. If we construe the knowledge implicit to one’s conception of the environment as theory, then we may refer to the knowledge implicit in one’s theorising as metatheory”.

In this sense then, “…developing theoreticians…are increasingly conscious of their theories as theories and of the logic underlying their theorising” (Moshman, 1979: 60). Therefore, one can conceive of metatheory as the underlying structure of theory. Overton (1998: 1) highlights that “metatheory presents a vision of the nature of the world and the objects of that world (e.g. do you accept a picture of persons as ‘active agents’ ‘constructing’ their known worlds, or as ‘recording devices’ that ‘process’ information). Metatheory is thus concerned with “…involving conscious knowledge of one’s own cognitive (in this case theoretical) behaviour…” and therefore the “…term ‘metatheory’ will be used…to refer to knowledge implicit in one’s theorising (as opposed to knowledge implicit in one’s theories) at all levels of development.

This paper aims to present an exploration of the underlying structure that accompanies liberal democratic consolidation theory. In order to develop a conscious knowledge of liberal democratic consolidation theory cognitive behaviour, a meta-theoretical appraisal becomes essential, especially considering it theoretical silence on its own resumptions and professed knowledge. This paper engages in an exploratory, qualitative discourse analysis of the underlying assumptions that inform the structure of liberal democratic consolidation theory. This is necessary in order to obtain a view of the epistemological tradition that informs liberal democratic consolidation theory. Therefore, one needs to explore the belief, truth and justication that informs the liberal democratic consolidation discourse, especially in its perceived unconsolidation in a non-Western context.

1.1 The purpose of a theoretical enquiry

Liberty, equality and the civic virtue form the foundation of liberal democratic theory. This translates into liberal democratic consolidation theory through institutions, regime performance and the cultivation of liberal democratic cultures through the transmission of its values. Consequently, this tradition argues that liberty is assured by establishing the liberal democratic institutions and processes, equality is addressed through an
adequate level of regime performance and guaranteed by the rule of law and constitutionalism, and finally the civic virtue is seen as the internalisation of liberal democratic values through institutionalism and regime performance.

The process of theorising is described by Moshman (1979: 60 – 63). He identifies essential steps in the process of developing theories that range from the identification of variables to epistemic humility. The isolation of variables is seen as “the most familiar aspect of metatheory…[through] understanding that one can only reach valid conclusions about the effects of some variable if all other variables are held constant” (Moshman, 1979: 60). Consequently, one is charged with the arduous task of identifying the static variables in theory. The constant variables of liberal democratic theory remains liberty, equality and the civic virtue. It is important to note that equality in this sense refers to political equality in the liberal democratic process and does not necessarily refer to socio-economic inequality. Due to growing inequality, substantivists argue that socio-economic inequality hinders liberty and participation as environmental factors like poverty and unemployment effectively remove the freedom of citizens and their ability and capability to participate in the liberal democratic process. Schumpeter (1943:235) adequately captures the argument of the substantivists by stating that “the inferences are on the one hand, that there cannot be democracy so long as that power exists – that mere political democracy is of necessity a sham – and, on the other hand, that the elimination of that power will at the same time end the ‘exploitation of man by man’ and bring about the ‘rule of the people’”.

Theory must also distinguish between testing and using hypotheses where “it seems likely that to the extent that one is relatively unaware of one’s theories…one tends to test and revise them implicitly during the course of applying them for practical purposes. Thus no sharp distinction is made between testing a theory and using a theory” (Moshman, 1979: 61). It is in this light that this paper is undertaken. There is a pressing need to assess the metamorphosis of liberal democratic consolidation theory in its quest to cultivate a liberal democratic culture through institutionalism and regime performance. To what extent has theory amended itself to fit a particular case study? To what degree are the case studies incorrect for not yielding the data that the theory expects? Is the non-Western world truly incapable of liberal democratic consolidation?
Alternatively, does liberal democratic consolidation theory need some level of revision in order to effectively deal with its numerous anomalies in the empirical realm?

The purpose of the theoretical inquiry is also to identify parsimony where “theories may also be protected against falsification by adding assumptions and corrections to account for unexpected data (Moshman, 1979: 62). This essentially means that theories are adjusted in order to deal with any anomalies that may arise. Such an employ is applicable to the variable of equality, in that it essentially referred to political equality in liberal democratic theory’s evolution, but later included aspects such as increased practical equality through a more levelled playing field in matters of a socio-economic nature.

Finally theory must be wary of idealisation where due to “…deriving from the quest for parsimony and the increasing differentiation of the hypothetical and empirical, is a trend…toward idealisation, a process in which one neutralises the distorting aspects of reality to construct an idealised theory which does not correspond directly to anything observable, but helps explain such observables”. In this sense, one is primarily engaged in speculation in order to explain the phenomenon that does not correspond to theory, but assist in explaining the phenomenon so that theory does not necessarily amend itself. The variable of the liberal civic virtue may be applicable here since there is a resistance to adopt the liberal democratic way of life, yet liberal democratic consolidation theory posits a clash of civilisations (Huntington, 1993) or a cultural obstacle thesis (Huntington, 1991) instead of challenging liberal democratic consolidation theory through metatheoretical enquiry and revision. Therefore, “unlike theory…metatheory tends toward logical necessity, though such necessity is always within the context of what is conceivable and thus relative to one’s present cognitive structures” (Moshman, 1979: 66).

Liberal democratic consolidation theory’s historical evolution is primarily concerned with the themes of liberal democracy theory, i.e. liberal civic virtue, liberty and equality. This is expected given that for a liberal democracy to be present the demos is entitled to political liberty and political equality through a commitment to a liberal civic virtue. Therefore, for successful democratisation in the liberal tradition, when a state consolidates its liberal democracy, these three features must be present. Firstly, civil
society must be active in its participation in the liberal democratic process; secondly, the liberal democratic process is supported by the institutions that guarantee political freedom in the execution of political life and participation; and lastly, equality in that in the political process all members of the polity are treated without discrimination and distinction. This relates to the procedural view of liberal democratic consolidation where the political realm is elevated above the socio-economic level.

The substantive interpretation of liberal democracy connects to consolidation as deepening or entrenching liberal democracy. The creation of a civic virtue is dependent upon reducing socio-economic inequality or a reduction in the class system. The state and its associated liberal democratic institutions must act in a way to ensure that redistribution of income leads to declining inequality and increased participation as society becomes more equitable.

Yet, these theoretical liberal wisdoms has not yet been subjected to a metatheoretical overview in a non-Western context. In order to conduct a metatheoretical enquire, Moshman (1979: 65) identified three general areas of metatheory: (i) physical transmission, (ii) social transmission; and (iii) linguistic transmission.

1.2 The physical transmission of liberal democratic consolidation’s metatheory

Physical transmission requires metatheory construction to be “…abstracted from the physical world. The confounding variables may lead to empirical contradictions and thus eventually to the concept of isolating variables, which presumably is more consistent when reinforced by one’s experience in the environment”. The physical environment of liberal democratic consolidation theory can be explained through structure-agency approaches to the political and social sciences. Structure can be regarded as limitations imposed on political elites in their political behaviour or the limits of demands that citizens can place on political elites (Imbroscio, 1999: 48). Agency refers to the responses of political elites to their imposed structures. Political elites may, for example, abide by the structure or may rebel against the structure in a specific context. Similarly, citizens may accept the limitations of their ability to

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2 The term equality is debatable. It needs to be remembered that equality from a procedural point of view refers to equality in the political process and from a substantive point of view it refers to decreasing socio-economic inequality. The use in this sense refers to the procedural interpretation of equality.
demand, or may engage in demonstrations and riots in an attempt to change the agency. The relationship between structure and agency is dubious in that there is little agreement on the importance of structures vis-à-vis agents and vice versa (Imbroscio, 1999: 46; and Adeney and Wyatt, 2004: 4 – 6).

Consequently then the “…structuralists’ accounts focus on the ‘constraints’ faced by individual actors (or human agency) – constraints that emanate from the structural environment in which individual actions occur. In general, structuralists find that the behaviour of agents is highly constrained and, as a result, conclude that the dominant structural factors at work in a given context largely determine political outcomes”. Agency, in contrast, “….while acknowledging the crucial role played by structures in political life, argue that structuralism underestimates the importance of individual actions (or human agency) in shaping political outcomes. Specifically, it misconceptualises the link between structure and agency by positing a unidirectional relationship between the two, with the former [structure] shaping the latter [agency]”.

Given the selfish and essentially Machiavellian characteristics of human nature, liberal democracy theory dictated that through the execution of the social contract it was necessary to impose limitations on agents (the people) in order to ensure that society does not remain within a state of nature. The result was the creation of the liberal democratic institutions that facilitate the generation of political equality and political liberty through the rule of law, constitutionalism and the elevation of political and civic liberties to the divine.

The structure of liberal democratic consolidation theory can be analysed on two levels. The first level in the structure of liberal democratic consolidation theory is related to the creation of the negotiations and settlements that characterise the transition period. These agreements create the structures of liberal democracy by expanding citizenship to cater for political liberties, the institutionalisation of constitutionalism and the rule of law through the constitutional agreements and the creation of civic liberties, and the centrality of the rule of the people through the creation and institutionalisation of the rules of the political game and elections. Consequently, the basic premise of the structure of liberal democratic consolidation theory is to limit or constrain the behaviour of the agents or political elites. Therefore, the structure of liberal democratic
consolidation fosters a new type of political agent committed to moderation, participation, bargaining and compromise. In order for the agents to remain legitimate within the structures created by liberal democratic consolidation theory, they are required to limit their behaviour and adjust their actions to remain within the boundaries of the liberal democratic structure. Therefore, acts such as violence, rebellion, ethnic mobilisation, and irresponsible electioneering are considered contradictory to the structure and may lead to the expulsion of the political agent from the liberal democratic process. This is not the case during the transition process. In the transition process the political elites become the structure and the structure becomes the agent due to the process of political crafting. Adeney and Wyatt (2004: 4) observe that “transition theory concentrates on the contribution of political elites to transitions to democracy…the emphasis is on the agency of political actors. Their actions and choices are seen to have a decisive impact on the democratic outcome. However, these actions may not be intentional and ‘may eventually bring about political regime changes that were neither anticipated nor desired by any of the participants at the beginning of the process’”. In this context when the structure of the new liberal democratic dispensation is being created, the choices made by political elites will influence the structure that will eventually dictate and limit their agency. The structure of the transition process however can be equated with the values that dictate the behaviour of political agents. The values are moderation and compromise, which were the focus of the majority of the works on liberal democratic consolidation such as those by Di Palma (1990), Huntington (1991), Diamond (1999) and Linz and Stepan (1996). The structure of liberal democratic consolidation theory does need to mature where through adhering to the structure of moderation and participation, participants will eventually need to become agents of the structure they had created. Once this occurs, the idea is that liberal democratic consolidation as stability has occurred.

In order to generate the values necessary for a liberal democratic dispensation, the structure of the newly created emerging liberal democracy is to act as both the agent and the structure. There is a reciprocal relationship between structure and agency within liberal democratic consolidation theory. In this sense structures act as agents in order to set limitations on the behaviour of agents when the political elites become the agents of the structure they had created. In this sense, there is a “…‘dual perspective’
[where] political and social outcome – rather than being structurally determined – unfold in a more contingent manner”. This was also identified by Bratton and De Walle (1997: 45 – 48) through their political contingency approach to the study of democratisation. Bratton and De Walle (1997: 45) argue that their approach is “…neither overtly deterministic or excessively voluntaristic…It retains an analytical focus of human agency, conflict, and choice, the elements that distinguish social science from the physical sciences”. This approach thus takes into consideration the human approaches associated with various events or the relationship between structure and agency in the liberal democratic development tradition. Therefore by highlighting the interaction between structures (institutions, rules, regulations, and process) and agents (political elites and actors within the liberal democratic process) liberal democratic consolidation theory attempts to generate a rational view of the execution of rule of the people. Imbroscio (2004: 47) stresses that “each of the two contrasting conceptualisations of the relationship between social structure and human agency yields a different standard of democratic responsiveness. Hence, our ultimate understanding of both democratic theory and practice – indeed of democracy itself – is necessarily linked to our understanding of structure and agency”. This implies “recasting the concept structure to show that structures in reality possess a ‘dual’ nature. This perspective accepts that the broader structural context shapes individual action, but also contends that these actions in turn shape that structural context”.

![Diagram of structure and agency in liberal democratic consolidation theory](image-url)
The second level of liberal democratic consolidation theory’s structure is found in the international system. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the international system changed to favour a liberal democratic dispensation. Essentially, the global push for liberal democratic development saw a shift in agency in that political actors were now committing to a liberal democratic dispensation. The result is that the major push for liberal democratic development facilitated a change in the behaviour of political elites as the alternative ideology of communism had folded and the only viable option open to political agents was liberal democracy.

This is primarily due to the centrality that institutions as structures and political elites as agents occupy. The Western liberal models demonstrated that the structures provided for by the liberal democratic process like constitutionalism, elections, rule of law, and civic and political liberties set forth to constrain elites (agents) in their behaviour by ensuring moderation through an adherence to the structures. The structures are also regarded as central to ensure rule of the people, which is isolated as the primary variable and purpose of liberal democratic theory. Therefore structures and agency need to ensure that rule of the people prevails at all costs. The negotiated settlements, bargaining, and participation of elites in the transition process set the tone for the acceptance of the structures, in other words, through this process there is supposed to be a level of buy-in from political elites as agents in the structures that will determine their political behaviour. As a result institutionalism and its relationship to structure-agency in liberal democratic consolidation theory prove central to attain the goal of liberal democracy – rule of the people where political and civic liberties guarantee the autonomy of the individual.

Structure and agency also relate to the relationship between regime performance and economic development and the upliftment of society to ensure adequate participation. The structure of emancipation is economic development which will facilitate regime performance. Consequently, economic development is the structure that will impact on the capacity and scope of regime performance as an agent. This is rational given that without adequate economic development and growth, the regime cannot generate sufficient resources to engage in its emancipator activities.
The institution of economic development and the agency of regime performance are necessary to ensure that people assess their social and political position more favourably in the new liberal democratic regime than in the authoritarian regime. The experience of the Western world saw that through education and viable social security, people are more likely to assess their material and social position in a positive light. In the emerging liberal democracies of the poor and non-Western world, however, poverty ensures that people are more concerned with day-to-day survival rather than assessing the progress of government. The lack of education also facilitates this as physical survival is more important than gaining an education. In addition, the higher the illiteracy level is within a state, coupled with severe hardships, the easier a demos can be manipulated to further the cause of dissident forces in a society. The question that theorists should ask is firstly, what is the potential for socio-economic development in the new political dispensations to meet the requirements of regime performance? At present there is an inherent belief that economic development will lead to increased regime performance, which in turn, will entrench the liberal democratic values through positive assessment of the new democratic regime and increased participations in its structure.

The physical environment demonstrates that liberal consolidation theory is rooted in the experiences of rationality that dominated the growth of liberal democratic theory. The underlying structure of liberal democratic consolidation theory is firmly set in the rationality associated with institutionalism in that rules, regulations, processes and procedures form the foundation of building a liberal democratic society. Scholars in the liberal democratic consolidation tradition demonstrate that through the interaction with liberal democratic institutions, political actors will emulate the values required in operating within the institutions of liberal democracy. Through their behaviour and commitment to the institutions, liberal democratic values will trickle down to civil society.

1.3 The social transmission of liberal democratic consolidation’s meta-theory

Social transmission of metatheory “…suggests that we learn mature theorising through social reinforcement, by imitating relevant behaviour, and/or by following relevant instructions…” (Moshman, 1979: 65). Therefore, metatheory is dependent upon a fortification of data, or in other words, theoretical data are constantly confirmed and
consequently, this confirmation it can lead to a socialisation process that renders theory correct. It is therefore important to attempt to gain a deeper insight into the social reinforcement that informed liberal democratic consolidation theory.

Liberal consolidation theory is firmly rooted in the liberal democratic experience. Liberal democratic theory is inherently linked to the process of political development that the Western world experienced, and consequently, liberal democratic consolidation theory will be amalgamated to the liberal democratic tradition. The successful liberal democratic development that characterised the Western world led to the social reinforcement of the path to political life that best ensures the rule of the people through a social contract that guarantees the political and civil freedoms of the individual and ensures stability through a commitment to the institutions and values of liberal democracy. Dupuis-Deri (2004: 120) notes that “regarding political history, it was quite common for American and French political figures to see themselves as direct heirs to classic civilisations and to believe that all through history, from Athens to Rome to Boston and Paris, the same political forces have faced off in eternal struggles”.

Therefore, the basic premise is that all civilisations have a desire for the values and way of life that the democrats had fought for. Indeed, Chatterjee (1997: 32) notes that “the explicit form of the postcolonial state…is that of modern liberal democracy”. The journey to modernity required an overhaul of the social and political system of non-Western states to mirror their mature Western liberal democratic counterparts. Social, political and cultural changes need to evolve to those associated with liberal democratic systems. Therefore, state and civil society interaction through the democratic structures must occur, political and civil liberties in the liberal tradition need to be institutionalised, and an entire society needs to be committed to the values of tolerance, secularism, multiculturalism, solidarity and moderation. These values however may not necessarily be compatible with non-Western cultures.

Therefore, the liberal democratic experiment for the emerging liberal democracy is three-fold: (1) economic stability must be achieved through the predominant paths to development and capitalism; (ii) liberal democracy and its associated behaviours and institutions need to become the only viable means of governance; and (iii) a common identity based on nationality rather than ethnicity must be created. All of this is to be

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undertaken in the name of constructing a liberal democracy. This denotes a theme of universalism which is a “…legacy of the ‘second modernity’ of the eighteenth century ‘Enlightenment’ and its extension into the nineteenth century positivism” (Castro-Gomez, 2002: 33). It is this undercurrent of universalism that proves somewhat idealistic on the part of the liberal democratic consolidation theorists. The assumption that all cultures and societies desire their values is somewhat arrogant, and ties in with the pedagogical interpretation of the development of the non-Western world. O’Dwyver (2003: 40) states that “President Clinton, in a speech at Beijing University in 1998, claimed that these [liberal] rights are ‘universal – not American rights or European rights…but the birthrights of people everywhere’. The rights he referred to are political liberty and political equality rooted in the development of liberal democratic discourse, and those rights that liberal democratic consolidation discourse seeks to recreate in an emerging liberal democracy. Indeed, “it is generally accepted by historians of liberal thought that these doctrines were gradually articulated as Western Europeans grappled with religious intolerance, political tyranny, and the emerging aspirations of mercantilist classes in the sixteenth century and seventeenth century…today such justifications are often couched in terms of natural rights of all persons, and with the economic rights of individuals and organisations. It is held that representative democratic government, with the provision of free and fair elections, for an independent judiciary, and for laws impartially protecting civil and economic liberties will best accommodate the doctrine of individual liberties and equal rights” (O’Dwyver, 2003: 41). In discussing the Asian example, O’Dwyver (2003: 43) observes that all theorists of liberal democracy should remember that

“…liberalism rose out of attempts to wrestle with problems arising from political absolutism, religious conflict, and the emergence of a market order. Confucianism arose against the backdrop of extended political strife in China in the fifth and sixth century B.C.. This era of civil instability had followed upon a semi-legendary period of unity and prosperity in China, marked by a succession of virtuous rulers. For Confucius, the political problem of his age was not how to limit the power of the established political authority, or how to secure a protected realm for individual conduct free from arbitrary coercion. His problem was one of the right moral education of potential rulers, ministers and officials that would
cultivate them into the character of the ‘exemplary person’ or gentleman and the
dispositions of virtues essential for good, benevolent government. In contrast to
Western classical liberalism, which emphasises rule of law and the limitation of
government power, Confucian thought emphasises a benevolent ‘rule of virtue’.
For Confucius…the crucial problem is ‘who should rule’”.

Liberal democratic consolidation theory sees it fit to attempt to change the foundation
upon which non-Western and, in many cases ancient, societies are built so that they
may mirror the universal society that liberal democratic consolidationists claim will
lead to prosperity, stability, and overall peace. The reality, however, is quite distinct in
that non-Western societies that attempt to modernise and therefore consolidate their
new liberal democratic dispensation, “…emerged…shocked to find…the crime,
poverty…were not merely propaganda…the dreamers had failed to realise that the
unhealthy political culture of the past would persist…most live in societies that
embrace the excesses of the West – commercialism, inequality, insecurity – while
disdaining the foundation of respect for civil rights and rule of law” (Rosenberg and
Hayner, 1999: 92). This translates into volatile socio-political and socio-economic
relations since there is shadow democracy. For that reason Kaunda (1964: 38) stated
that “…democracy cannot be the cure for all our evils; democracy is merely an
umbrella which can exist for good or evil. Under a democratic system both good and
bad governments can prosper and both just and unjust laws can be enacted. The system
of slavery existed in a democratic system but this system of slavery was itself destroyed
through democracy”.

Social transmission associated with liberal democratic consolidation theory is related to
the traditional versus modern dichotomy. In this sense, the modern nations of the
mature liberal democracies saw it necessary to ensure the modernisation of the
perceived traditional and backward societies of the non-Western world. Consequently,
“(…all people want democracy and the market, no matter what their culture or their state
of economic development is, these can be installed virtually overnight” (Hassner, 2008:
6 – 7). Nyamnjoh (2003: 9 – 100) points out that
“…[elevated] versions of Western cultures have been forced onto the people of Africa as the best to way, to be followed without equivocation or reservation. Evident in this outlook is impatience with alternative systems of thoughts and practice, and a desire to impose the neo-liberal…approach as the best way to achieve betterment. While inviting others to break free of the boundaries of customs, traditions, and worldviews informed by their cultures of origin, the homogenising view…affords itself the insensitive arrogance of power and comfort by refusing to make concessions or negotiate with difference. Modernity as hegemonic modes of social life and organisation of European origin poses as a giant compressor determined to crush every other civilisation in order to reduce them to the model of the industrialised, preying, and globalising West”.

Liberal democratic consolidation theory regards itself as the only viable route to achieve modernity. The self-image it portrays, and indeed reinforces, is that the liberal democratic model is the most ennobled form of modern political organisation. Castro-Gomez (2002: 31) observes that the need for modernity and civilisation “…arises in the heat of the debates that took place in Spain concerning the necessity to submit the Native American to colonial domination…the idea of race served as a criteria for the social differentiation between the white colonisers and the mulatto…colonised, seen as inferior for their colour and social origin”. In this light then, the “…peoples that appear more ‘advanced’…could legitimately occupy the territory of the more ‘backward’ peoples and bestow the benefits of civilisation upon them, with no troubling pangs of conscience” (Castro-Gomez, 2002: 31). It is the model to which all emerging democracies should aspire. Anomalies, such as Singapore’s Confucius-inspired model are subjected to much criticism and scepticism, indeed, labelled not as a democracy, but a soft authoritarian regime. It is seen as isomorphic in that it appears similar to the mature liberal democracies, but is genetically different. O’Dwyver (2002: 39) notes that “the ideological confrontation between liberal democratic societies and the authoritarian or illiberal societies of East Asia presents some interesting challenges for contemporary liberal political philosophers”. Alternatively, Matlosa (2007: 62) identifies four types of regimes in Africa, which are

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3 Portuguese/Spanish word meaning a person of colour.

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“(1)...liberal democracies with stable and consolidating democratic frameworks...(2) electoral democracies whose democratic credentials are stronger in relation to holding regular elections while in between and beyond elections they suffer enormous democratic deficits...(3)...grey-zone democracy, ambiguous democracy, pseudo-democracy, illiberal democracy, virtual democracy, electoral authoritarianism or liberalised autocracy...have embraced the political culture of multiparty elections, [h]owever, the credibility of the elections is often questionable and election outcomes are always contested [where] electoral governance does not ensure procedural certainty and substantive uncertainty, and elections therefore become a façade behind which authoritarianism thrives...(4)...dictatorships, authoritarianism, closed authoritarianism or unreformed autocracy...that have not yet undergone political transition to multiparty democracy...”.

What is evident is that many states attempt to model, albeit not successfully, the liberal democratic model as exported through various processes such as colonialism and globalisation. Political and economic development in the liberal tradition is therefore high on the agenda, and non-Western states, which do not necessarily occupy a position of power in the international dispensation, are strongly urged to adopt the liberal system and modernise with the help of the mature democracies. Many non-Western states are struggling with copying the liberal democratic ideal for various reasons such as history, ethnic diversity, or cultural obstacles – if liberal democratic scholars are to be believed. Indeed, Seth (1995: 34) notes that “…for the receiving societies of today, adopting and working in the institutions of modern representative democracy has been quite a different story. These societies, for different historical reasons – colonisation, westernisation, and modernisation – have not been able to develop political institutions of democracy on the basis of their own histories and political cultural traditions”. Chatterjee (1997: 31) is of the view that this pause in democratic development “…is significant because it is the mark of non-western modernity as an always incomplete project of ‘modernisation’ and of the role of an enlightened elite engaged in a pedagogical mission in relation to the rest of society”. Hadiz (2004: 58) concurs by pointing out that “…the postcolonial state would be conceived as the main agent for

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4 Receiving societies in this sense refers to postcolonial states that are urged to adopt a system of liberal democracy. Seth focuses on the case of India in his scholarship.
modernisation and development…early modernisation theorists envisaged a particularly positive role for technocratic elites – especially those who had benefitted from Western-style education and were immersed in ‘Western’, modern values – given the broader social and cultural conditions of the postcolonial era that were characterised as being patrimonial or pre-modern”. Therefore, Africa and other post-colonial, non-Western states are still struggling to emulate the liberal democratic system of governance and way of life, and consequently are still in need of education in order to become modern and successful like their Western counterparts. It is interesting to note that this exercise has been in existence since independence of many states from the 1950s, and yet there still seems to be no end in sight for the modernisation process of the post-colonial state.

The underlying structure that accompanies liberal democratic consolidation theory is rooted in modernisation. In other words, the crusade of enlightened modernity is an undercurrent that informs the necessity for liberal democratic consolidation’s discourse. It is in the interest of the traditional societies to emulate the models of liberal democracy of their modern counterparts. Therefore a pedagogical mission is well underway to pull the emerging liberal democratic world out of chaos, poverty and suffering; the emerging liberal democratic world needs to be saved from a state of nature. This will enable them to move out of poverty, illiteracy and authoritarianism toward a liberal and equal society coupled with prosperity through economic growth and increased regime performance rooted in citizenship and universalism. Centeno (1994: 141) observes “we use words such as ‘market’ and ‘democracy’ as if these mean the same thing in Moscow, Madrid, or Manilla”. Due to different cultural and ideological contexts, democracy, with its associated discourse on equality and liberty will have different meanings. Chatterjee correctly observed that political life is context produced in the non-Western world. In the postcolonial and non-Western context, this has proven somewhat problematic. Seth (1995: 27 – 28) when discussing the case of India observes that

“Even…after 47 years of independence, India continues to grapple with two competing histories, the civilisational history of co-living by different cultural-religious entities and the political history marked by ethnic competition and conflicts. The dialectic which is at work today of containing the conflictual

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cultural-religious identities within the supra-identity of nation-state is in a great measure informed by the memory of the national movement for independence as well as the partition of the country at the time of independence”.

Similar discourses that depict a duality of dialogue are also found in Africa. Boele van Hensbroek (1998: 70) notes that “the task of reconstructing the major political discourses in the time of colonial rule is not an easy one. On the one hand, all intellectuals seem to share a basic concern for gaining self-government. On the other hand, one finds large contrasts among the relevant political texts which indicate important differences at the level of discourses”. Consequently, the liberation struggle served to unite the people of Africa, both on a continental level and national level. The post-independence discourse, however, is filled with contradictions ranging from modernisation to scientific socialism, and from single-party necessity to the right to choose under a multiparty regime. What is prevalent in both these cases is that the conception of the modern nation-state as envisaged by the Western liberal mature democracies has proven somewhat illusive to achieve in a postcolonial and non-Western context. Therefore the underlying current of modern citizenship in liberal democratic consolidation theory is difficult to achieve in societies which do not know who their citizens are and who their citizens ought to be. The politics of space and belonging cannot be accounted for in liberal democratic consolidation discourse, primarily due to a bias towards the ability of institutions to manage such conflicts. Also, liberal democratic consolidation discourse attempts to reinforce the idea of a nation-state, and sees itself as the “…only suitable form of governance both for managing the modern state – which is now ubiquitous – and for mediating the forces of rapid economic and cultural change occurring in all the societies of the world today” (Seth, 1995).

Interestingly, liberal democratic consolidation theory contradicts one of its main values, that of tolerance. By virtue of disregarding anything that is considered traditional or cultural, it occupies a position of politico-cultural domination. Liberal democratic consolidation theory, rooted in the Western tradition of political development, regards itself as charged with the liberal illumination of the non-Western world. Indeed, the discourse on cultural assimilation of liberal democratic values through the institutions of the liberal democratic process points to its perceived superiority over alternative
systems found within non-Western political societies exported through the principle of universalism.

Consequently, an undercurrent of liberal democratic consolidation theory is the premise that liberal democracy is the most desirable form of government and way of life. It is elevated to the status of the universal, without recognising that it is merely a global phenomenon due to the culmination of historical events. The fall of the Berlin Wall further reinforced the prestige associated with liberal democracy. Huntington’s Wave Theory is a mechanism of social transmission in liberal democratic consolidation theory.

The social reinforcement of liberal democratic consolidation occurs within its institutions and the structure of institutionalism through which political agents must operate. Institutions are charged with managing diverse interests and conflict that may arise within the political system. Therefore, within the liberal democratic consolidation tradition, social transmission is seen on one level as managing diversity and interests within the democratic process and its associated rules, processes, and procedures. Liberal democratic consolidation theory prides itself that its ability through the transmission of its values of tolerance, moderation, secualism, and multiculturalism will ensure adequate protection of the individual. These institutions are said to aid the construction of national solidarity in their ability to manage diverse interests and identities. Beissinger (2008: 87 - 88) argues that

“history offers examples of democracy blooming amid ethnic variety. Many of the ‘first wave’ of democratisation of North America and Western Europe (the United States, France, Great Britain, Canada, Belgium, and Switzerland) were highly diverse states. At the same time, the first wave occurred in an era where language and ethnicity were not yet commonly held to be – as they are now – a basis upon which to claim political and social rights, complete with internationally recognised norms of self-determination and minority protection to back them up”.

Liberal democratic consolidation theory therefore praises itself for managing diversity through inclusion and the institutions of the liberal democratic process. This may have been applicable in the development of the mature liberal democracies, as Beissinger
highlights. The reality in a non-Western context is very different. The colonial boundaries grouped together many nation-states into one single territorial unit that will comprise the new nation-state. The colonial experience redrew the boundaries of many territories and attempted to create homogeneous communities rooted in the colonial identity. Indeed, in states like India “politically, the diverse and social entities were thus held together not in a single state but in a single politico-environment. Such a civilisational society was straighjacketed into a single territorial state through colonial rule and into a nation-state after independence” (Seth, 1995: 26). Colonial boundaries sought to create a multitude of new territories, which at independence resulted in the creation of a multitude of new nation-states that had joined the international community. Indeed, Gupta and Ferguson (1992: 6 -7) note that “it is so taken for granted that each country embodies its own distinctive culture and society that terms of ‘society’ and ‘culture’ are routinely simply appended to the names of nation-states, as when a tourist visits India to understand ‘Indian culture’ and ‘Indian society’ or Thailand to experience ‘Thai culture’ or the United States to get a whiff of ‘American culture’”.

In many instances the divine political institutions that liberal democratic consolidation theory seeks to construct are too weak to manage the ethnic undercurrent, or alternatively, are dominated by the majority groups within a territory. The ideas of nation-state, national identity, nation building and national solidarity that underlie liberal democratic consolidation theory prove somewhat idealistic as long as the institutions remain institutions of competition rather than institutions of cooperation, and peace and stability will not be the expected result. The quality of citizenship, a central theme in liberal democratic consolidation discourse, is thus somewhat tainted in post-colonial and non-Western contexts due to different experiences of the liberal democratic institutions, or alternatively, the different ideological and philosophical foundations that inform a society. Liberal democratic institutions will not ensure the attainment of quality citizenship, but only, as Guillomee noted, different intensities of citizenship.
1.4 The linguistic transmission of liberal democratic consolidation’s metatheory

The linguistic transmission of metatheory finds its foundation on the “…philosophy of positivism…[it] would hold that metatheory is differentiated from theory and construed as logically necessary because it is not learned from the physical world but rather is inherent in the semantics and syntax of our language…” (Moshman, 1979: 65). However, Moshman further notes that “…cognition is not so much a reflection of language as the underlying basis for it…it…seems likely that the way we test hypotheses is simply an artefact of the way we talk about them”. The role of language and discourse has already been dealt with extensively earlier, but for the purposes of this metatheoretical exploration it will be useful to touch on some aspects pertaining to the language of liberal democratic consolidation.

The first point that needs further exploration is that of social dominance. Liberal democratic consolidation theory can be interpreted as a form of social dominance theory. In this sense, the inherent language of liberal democratic consolidation theory opens itself to a “…prejudice and discrimination…[in other words] systematic group oppression and structural inequality” (Sidanuis et al, 2004: 846). In unpacking the physical and social transmission of liberal democratic consolidation’s metatheory, the language associated with it is one that invariably places the mature Western liberal democracies on a higher and more elevated level that the emerging liberal democracies. This is evident in the semantics of liberal democratic consolidation theory. The term developed denotes that something has reached maturity. It is therefore considered to be complete in its evolution and can therefore be considered matured and settled. The term emerging, in contrast, denotes something that is still growing and evolving. In this sense, the process of maturation is still incomplete and there is still a process of development to go through in order to reach maturity. By referring to non-Western societies and civilisations as still emerging, liberal democratic consolidation theory elevates their mature counterparts to the position of parent.

In this sense, the emerging liberal democracy must learn from the mature democracy in order to successfully emulate the developed system of governance and find enlightenment in adopting the liberal values and way of life. Consequently, an
underlying structure in the narrative of liberal democratic consolidation theory is one of paternalism, where by virtue of being developed, it is charged with guiding the growing liberal democracy. Seth (1995: 33 – 33) points out that many Third World states are still at the *receiving end*. By implication, this means that many states which had great civilisations prior to the colonial legacy, are still prescribed to in that they are regarded as less developed and inferior to the mature liberal Western democracies. Therefore, by default of the current global organisational structure, they are instructed and expected to emulate the models of development and governance in the path towards development and maturity. Seth (1995: 36) notes that “this project of global homogenisation has brought about a sharp divide – linguistic, cultural, and economic…all forms of governance other than liberal democracy…are deemed suspect…even if they are embedded in a culture of political democracy…every non-liberal nation is expected to make the transition to a liberal state and democracy”. Therefore, the expectation is that due to the perceived universalism of liberal democratic values, all states, regardless of their cultural heritage, must modernise and develop to adopt the Western model. This is one of the primary concerns of liberal democratic consolidation theory’s discourse. It prides itself on the global movement for liberal democracy; it regards it as empirical evidence that liberal democracy is desirable across the globe, and consequently, it is charged with prescribing to non-Western states how to achieve the liberal democratic model.

Paley (2002: 473) states that “after the Cold War, the defeat of socialism as both actually-existing system and utopian ideal provoked a widely heralded triumphalism linked to democracy with free market economies and a simultaneous disillusionment with actually-existing, if newly wrought, social, political, and economic conditions”. The *End of History* resulted in a complete and extreme make-over of many non-Western nations to put them on their journey as *emerging* liberal democracies. So high was the success and victory of liberal democracy on the agenda, that liberal democratic consolidation theory “while maintainig a modernist narrative of democracy’s universal applicability, [assisted] international agencies, donor institutions, and nongovernmental organisations seeking to implement democracy programmes around the world, which have not always circumvented cultural conceptions and local political institutions;
instead they have at times sought to mould apparently traditional political structures to electoral reform” (Paley, 2002: 474).

It is inherent in the language of liberal democratic consolidation theory that liberal democracy is good, while alternative forms of governance are malevolent. It is inherent in the language of liberal democratic consolidation theory that there is an obligation on non-Western nations, in the name of development, industrialisation, and modernisation, to grow and aspire towards the liberal democratic model. There is an inherent assumption in the dialogue of liberal democratic consolidation that in order to secure citizenship and the greatest good for the greatest number, non-Western states must cast off the shackles of traditionalism and embark on the journey to modernity. In order to attain stability, non-Western states are urged to abandon theocratic limits on the individual for secularism, tolerance, and multiculturalism.

1.5 The meta-theory of liberal democratic consolidation theory

The structure and agency of the meta-narrative of liberal democratic consolidation theory renders it a theory connected with the realities of non-Western nations and sensitive and tolerant to the inherent traditions and histories of evolution of non-Western nations; liberal democratic consolidation theory takes on a prescriptive character. Instead of utilising the data from the empirical field pertaining to the difficulties of non-Western states to consolidate a liberal democracy, liberal democratic consolidation theory is guilty of idealising its own theoretical prescriptions. It is inherent in the language of liberal democratic consolidation theory that there is an ideological bias towards liberalism present, in that the liberal values and their view of human nature are applicable across the globe. Its system of perceptual-representation is inherent in the theoretical discourse where liberalism and its associated conversation is desirable, and by creating the conditions conducive to liberal democracy, liberal democratic consolidation theory can be regarded as an ideological extension in that it possesses an assessment of the current state of affairs, and contains a plan of action for a better future. Given this consideration, liberal democratic consolidation theory does not see the need to revisit its theories and discourse, as it is the case studies that do not comply with the theoretical assertions. Consequently, liberal democratic consolidation theory is classified as a means of social dominance in that “…social ideologies help to
coordinate the actions of institutions and individuals” (Sidanius et al 2004: 847). This implies that “people share knowledge and beliefs that legitimise discrimination, and most often they behave as if they endorsed these ideologies” (ibid). Given the nature of the physical and social transmission of liberal democratic consolidation theory’s metanarrative, it regards its end-product as far superior to any other forms of socio-political organisation given that it sees liberal democracy as the culmination of modernisation. In other words, to move from an essentially negative traditional society, there is an obligation on non-Western states to modernise and adopt the Western political way of life and system of governance. Its ideology allows social domination given the belief in the centrality of the individual’s entitlement to political liberty and political equality. Through its discourse, it has created “…group-based hierarchies…” (Sidanius et al, 2004: 847) through dividing the world into mature and emerging democracies. The former are seen as superior and complete in the journey to liberal democratic development, while the latter are regarded as inferior due to their seeming inability to attain the liberal democratic utopia. Its structure and agency therefore allows for a form of discrimination against all societies that do not necessarily comply with the vision of a liberal world that liberal democratic consolidation theory holds dear.

It is here that the critical variance in liberal democratic consolidation theory lies. It is rooted in the Western experience, which is not necessarily the democratic experience in a non-Western context. There is little recognition for the good in the alternative systems of governance and their associated societal values. The consequence is that liberal democratic consolidation theory attempts to deliver a do-it-yourself-guide to emerging states attempting to embrace liberal democracy.

Liberal democratic consolidation theory’s epistemology is communicated through its physical, social and linguistic transmissions. Its identification of truths centres on the development of liberal democracy theory and the context in which it grew. The truths of knowledge that liberal democratic consolidation theory therefore holds as its epistemology rest on political liberty, political equality, and the generation of a liberal civic virtue through the institutionalisation of political life and the centrality of the individual. Indeed, it is only through the liberal democratic path that human
emancipation can occur; this being demonstrated in the liberal democratic development that led to the success of the Western world.

Therefore, its experience gave it the knowledge that stability, prosperity and wealth are generated through the path to modernisation and individualisation of society. This is also the truth disseminated by liberal democratic consolidation theory. It is justified in its belief, taught by its own experience, that good societies are created in the liberal tradition. Therefore, liberal democratic consolidation theory’s epistemology is firmly rooted in its own path to maturation, without very much concern for the journeys that non-Western states underwent in the construction of their societies and their value system. These are seen as shackles of traditionalism that inhibit the development of a good society founded upon the liberal democratic values and socio-political organisation.

The epistemological foundations of liberal democratic consolidation theory rest on the following pillars. The first pillar relates to the perceived desirability of liberal democracy. Given its social transmission, liberal democratic consolidation theory holds it as an inevitable truth that all cultures and societies have an inherent desire to emulate the Western system. Secondly, the values associated with liberal democracy are regarded as universal. These universal values, it is believed, are applicable to all cultures and societies regardless of their origin or history. Thirdly, the only path to development, prosperity, and peace and stability is rooted in the Western experience. The nature of the liberal democracy’s system of governance, and its associated economic system that generates sufficient regime performance, have the capacity to lift states and people out of poverty and suffering. Finally, citizenship can only be guaranteed in the liberal democratic tradition.

The foundation of the liberal democratic consolidation is individualism and the social contract. The nature of the social contract therefore requires the individual to be a responsible citizen so as to enjoy the maximum amount of political and civic liberty and political equality.

1.6 Conclusion
In order to conclude the discussion, the paper wishes to put forward a question that may warrant further research. Liberal democratic consolidation theory has failed to
recognise that in non-Western states with diverse ethnicities and cultures, it has created structures that are comparable to agonistic democracy where “…conflict, rather than consensus, are dedicated to difference rather than the general interest…” (Gabardi, 2001: 552). In this model of democracy the “…heart of politics [is located] in the existential struggle to form identities and advance different ways of life in an environment of contingency, plurality and power” (Garbardi, 2001: 552).

Given the nature of agonistic democracy, it is therefore useful to explore its applicability considering the meta-narrative of liberal democratic consolidation theory. This by no means attempts to imply that the actual result of liberal democratic consolidation theory is agonism, but rather, that given the difficulties that liberal democratic growth is facing, it may be a wise expectation.

A vast body of literature is concerned with the growing income gaps between rich and poor nations, and the adverse effects that globalisation and its associated processes have on the poorest of the poor. The assertion that liberal democratic consolidation theory makes regarding the role of regime performance and economic development and growth to deal with poverty, seems nowhere near the reality that many non-Western and poor states are facing. The body of literature also argues the nature of power relations between generally Western and non-Western states. Given the nature of the inequality between the West and their non-Western counterparts, which exclude some Asian economies, the liberal Western world occupies a dominant position and is able to prescribe to its poor non-Western counterparts. The disparity in income allows liberal democracies to place certain conditions on foreign aid and donations. The result is invariably some form of electoral process or the creation of the initial steps towards embracing liberal democracy.

There is much concern around the rise of populism and the apparent *backsliding* of Eastern Europe, as well as the liberal democratic difficulties that the world faces. Given the assumption of superiority and dominance of liberal democracy, does it not facilitate competition for the existence of alternative ways of life? The Asian and Islamic examples should be an indicator to liberal democratic consolidation theory that its supposed universalism is not a universalism, but a particularism rooted in the Western experience of liberal democratic development.
In its meta-narrative, liberal democratic consolidation theory creates an environment conducive to agonistic democracy. It fails to recognise its own internal bias and consequently sets out on a crusade to bring liberal salvation to the non-Western world and nations, states, and culture in need of liberal redemption.

**Bibliography**


