

REFLECTIONS ON 'TRANSITOLOGY' – Before and After

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We did not invent the concept of “transitology,” but Guillermo O'Donnell and I have been repeatedly associated with it and even blamed for its existence. When we wrote Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusion about Uncertain Democracies, we had virtually no existing literature to draw upon. Books and articles on how ‘real-existing’ democracies functioned and managed to survive constituted a sizeable library. Those on how these regimes came to be democratic might have filled a few shelves – and most of them consisted of historical descriptions of single cases. For the most part we ransacked the case studies produced by the other participants in the Woodrow Wilson Center project, but both of us also reached back to the classics of political thought. I personally found a lot of inspiration in the work of Niccolò Machiavelli who, I discovered, had been grappling some time ago with regime change in the opposite direction, i.e. from ‘republican’ to ‘princely’ rule. My hunch is that Guillermo reached similar conclusions based on his critical reading of the literature on established liberal democracies that assumed the prior need for a lengthy list of requisite conditions and, hence, the virtual impossibility for any newcomers to enter this select and privileged group of about twenty regimes.ⁱ

Neither of us could imagine that the fledgling efforts we were observing in Southern Europe and Latin America in the early 1980s would soon be followed by almost seventy other regime transformations in all regions of the world.ⁱⁱ In each case, the declared (and publicly supported) objective was to become democratic – more or less according to the norms and practices of those twenty or so forerunners in Western Europe, North America and Oceania. These surprise events, especially

the ones in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, presented us with an extraordinary scientific opportunity and intellectual risk – not to mention a lot normative satisfaction. Could the concepts, assumptions, hypotheses and “tentative conclusions” that we had derived from the early cases be stretched to fit a much larger set of countries with very different starting points in terms of prior regimes, historical experiences and cultural norms? Needless to say, the Arab Spring that began in 2010 offers an even greater challenge to transitologists, since these countries had so often been declared “Beyond the Pale” of democracy for cultural (Arab) or religious (Muslim) reasons.

The pretence of this neo- and, perhaps, pseudo-science is that it can explain and, hopefully, guide the way from one regime to another or, more specifically in the present context, from some form of autocracy to some form of democracy. Its subject matter consists of a period of time – a liminal one of varying length – that begins with the demise of one more or less established (if not legitimate) set of rules for the exercise of power and ends with the consolidation of another set of rules. Its intrinsic value rests on the assumption that choices made during this period will have an enduring effect upon the eventual outcome – either upon the type of regime that ensues and/or the quality of its performance.

Its founder and patron-saint, if it has one, should be Niccoló Machiavelli. For the "wily Florentine" was the first great political theorist, not only to treat political outcomes as the artefactual and contingent product of human collective action, but also to recognize the specific problematics and dynamics of regime change.

Machiavelli gave to transitology its two fundamental principles.ⁱⁱⁱ **Uncertainty**, (he called it *fortuna*) was the first and most important one: "There is nothing more

difficult to execute, nor more dubious of success, nor more dangerous to administer than to introduce a new system of things". Furthermore, he warned us that its potential contribution would always be modest. According to his estimate, "in female times", i.e. during periods when actors behaved capriciously, immorally, without benefit of shared rules and relatively free from physical constraints (*necessità*), only 50% of political events were potentially understandable. The other half was due to unpredictable events of *fortuna*.

Agency (he called it "*virtù*") was the second. When the behaviour of political actors was so uncertain due to the absence of reliable institutions or practices and so underdetermined by structural constraints, the outcome would depend to an unusual extent upon the willingness of actors to take risks, the acuity with which they could assess the situation and the decisiveness with which they could carry through their decisions. Machiavelli attributed these qualities to the actions of a single person (hence, the title of his masterwork, The Prince). Today, we would probably assign this task to some collectivity – a party, a cabal, a junta – given the greater volume and complexity of the decisions that have to be taken.

Hence, transitology was born (and promptly forgotten) with limited scientific pretensions and marked practical concerns. At best, it was doomed to become an obscure and complex mixture of rules of contingent political behavior and maxims for prudential political choice -- when it was revived almost 480 years later.

Initial Assumptions *cum* Hypotheses

Virtually all of the following assumptions or hypotheses can be derived from its basic principles of unusual high levels of practical uncertainty and potential agency. These are present – although not always stated so explicitly – in the concluding Transitions volume.

The Immediate Situation: During the early stages of regime transformation, an exaggerated form of "political causality" tends to predominate in a situation of rapid and unpredictable change, high risk, shifting interests and indeterminate strategic reactions. Actors believe that they are engaged in a "war of movement" where dramatic options are available and the outcome depends critically on their choices. They find it difficult to specify *ex ante* which classes, sectors, institutions or groups will support their efforts -- indeed, most of these collectivities are likely to be divided or hesitant about what to do. Once this heady and dangerous moment has passed, some of the actors begin to "settle into the trenches" or, as the contemporary jargon calls it: "consolidate a new regime."^{iv} Hopefully, they will be compelled to recognize and respect mutually-agreed upon rules, organize their internal structures more predictably, consult their constituencies more regularly, mobilize their resource bases more reliably, and consider the long-term consequences of their actions more seriously. In so doing, they will inevitably experience the constraints imposed by deeply-rooted material deficiencies and normative habits -- most of which will not have changed that much with the fall of the *ancien régime*.

The Possible Outcomes: Transitions **from** autocratic or authoritarian regimes (as opposed to the more deterministic notion of transitions **to** democratic ones) can lead to diverse outcomes. Based solely on historical experience, the **first** and most probable would seem to be a reversion to the same or a different form of autocracy.^v Few countries reached democracy on their first try or by strictly linear and incremental means. Most had to revert to some version of the *statu quo ante* or to pass through periods of rule by sheer force before becoming democratic. Some countries became notorious for the number of their attempts and failures (e.g. Spain and Portugal in Europe, Ecuador and Bolivia in South America, Turkey in the Middle East, Thailand in Asia, Nigeria in Africa), but eventually even they managed to consolidate some type of democracy. The **second** possible outcome is the

formation of a hybrid regime which does not satisfy the minimal procedural criteria for political democracy, but which does not regress to the *statu quo ante*. These *dictablandas* and *democraduras*, as we called them, probably do not constitute a stable and enduring solution to the generic problems of government, but they may be useful improvisations in order to gain time -- either for a regression to autocracy or an eventual progression to democracy. A **third** logical outcome (which we did not explicitly entertain) may be the most insidious. Terry Karl and I subsequently called it: "unconsolidated democracy."^{vi} Politics trapped in this category are, in a sense, condemned to democracy without enjoying the consequences and advantages that it offers. They are stuck in a situation in which all the minimal procedural criteria for democracy are respected, but without mutually acceptable rules of the game to regulate the competition between political forces. Whatever formal rules are enunciated in the constitution or basic statutes are treated as contingent arrangements to be bent or dismissed when the opportunity presents itself. The **fourth** possible outcome is the one we most obviously desired, namely, a democracy consolidated via mutually acceptable rules and broadly valued institutions of civic freedom, political tolerance and fair competition among its major actors. Defining the precise moment when this occurs or measuring accurately the extent to which this has been accomplished, we knew would not be an easy task. Indeed, insisting upon too much of it would mean a contradiction in terms since democracies are never completely consolidated. They are unique among regime-types in their presumed capability for self-transformation and in the degree to which they incorporate uncertainty into their normal functioning.

The Available Agents: Antonio Gramsci had already updated Machiavelli's thoughts about agency for us when he argued that under modern conditions, the **Prince** could not be an individual capable of assessing the situation and taking 'virtuous' risks on his own, but had to be a **Party** capable of offering a plausible alternative view of the future and capturing the allegiance of a critical mass of

followers.^{vii} Granted that democracy is supposed to be produced (and re-produced) by citizens, it is only when they are assembled into a collectivity large enough to win elections or influence the formation of governments that they become capable of contributing to regime transformation. Like most political scientists, Guillermo and I took this maxim for granted.^{viii} We observed that political parties rarely contributed much to the demise of autocratic regimes, but as soon as a transition had become credible and ,especially, after elections of uncertain outcome had been convoked, they immediately moved in and displaced the various associations, movements and heroic individuals that had contributed so much more. By not stating it explicitly, we missed the opportunity to give early transitology one of its most stirring slogans: “Get the Parties Right!”^{ix} Orthodox liberal economists (who knew much less than we did about the distinctiveness of transitions) unhesitatingly proclaimed that all that was needed was to “Get the Prices Right!” and all of the other features of a functioning capitalist system would fall into place. We were probably inhibited from making such a proclamation by the fact our own work had focused more extensively on organizations of civil society and by the suspicion that we did not know what constituted a “right” party system. The literature on ‘real-existing democracies’ tended to assume that a system with only two effective governing parties was superior to all others, but that seemed an unrealistic and potentially perverse outcome in polities we were studying, especially those in Southern Europe. We also were aware that several of them had had historically relatively well-entrenched party systems, e.g. Uruguay, Chile, Greece, which had proven incapable of preventing takeovers by autocratic rulers.

The Potential Modes of Transition: My colleague and co-author, Terry Karl, has advanced the hypothesis that the type and quality of democracy will depend significantly (but not exclusively) on the mode of transition from autocracy.^x It is during this period that actors choose most of the arrangements that are going to govern their future cooperation and competition. Most importantly, the mode of

transition influences the identity of actors and the power relations between them. Also, depending on the mode, they may be compelled to make choices in a great hurry, with imperfect information about the available alternatives and without much reflexion about longer-term consequences. Their fleeting arrangements, temporary pacts and improvised accommodations to crises tend to accumulate and to set precedents. Some may find their way into more formal, even constitutional, norms. It is, therefore, useful to consider the possibility of "birth defects" in the democratization process that are due, not just to structural features long present in the society, but also to conjunctural circumstances that surround the moment of regime change itself. Together, Terry Karl and I delineated four generic modes of transition depending on the presence or absence of large-scale violence and the dominance of elite or mass actors and labelled them (1) reform; (2) revolution; (3) pacted; and (4) imposed.^{xi} The first two had been the most prominent historically, but the latter two seemed even then to have become more frequent. In short, efforts at democratization from below seemed to be giving way to efforts from above – from within or in negotiation with the *ancien régime*. Each of the four seemed generically to "push" toward a different outcome.

The Prevailing International Context: Guillermo and I were convinced from the cases we were then comparing that democratization was (and even should be) a fundamentally endogenous process – in two senses. The exogenous structural context – precisely those features of international dependency that we both had argued were so important in the advent of autocracy during the previous two decades in Latin America – seemed too diverse and too remote from the motivations of the agents of change to have played an analogous role in the inverse process of regime transformation we were observing. The exogenous conjuncture of intentional action also seemed unfavorable – again for the countries that interested us. ‘Real-existing’ democracies had long proclaimed their support for democracy elsewhere, but had done little to accomplish this. Indeed, for alleged reasons of national

security, they had actively encouraged or passively tolerated the autocracies that emerged and persisted in both 'Southern' regions. We also observed that precisely due to the uncertainty of the process and to the enhanced agency of its own actors in making their choices about rules, outsiders seemed to be unprepared concerning when and how to act and, even if they did intervene, their actions were not likely to have a predictable and effectual impact.^{xii} We were, of course, aware that neo-democracies would inevitably attempt to adopt and adapt the practices of previous democracies that they considered successful, but were confident that, since they would not be able to repeat these prior paths to democracy, the outcome of such efforts would be diverse – if not perverse. This "unrepeatability" of the democratization process has incalculable secondary consequences, all connected with profound changes both in the domestic and international contexts and with the nature of already established democracies. In other words, scholars or pundits who simply extrapolate from quantitative data or extract qualitative "lessons" based on the experiences of their predecessors are likely to make serious errors in their estimation of present outcomes.^{xiii} In the Transitions volume, we carefully avoided drawing inferences about the future of our cases from past patterns of regime change - – although we did not explicitly develop the notion of distinctive "waves" of democratization

The Presumed Unit of Government: In one key aspect, our revival of transitology differed significantly from the original version. Machiavelli's attention was focused less on the distribution and use of political power and more on the founding of the unit within which that power would be exercised. In contemporary terms, he was primarily interested in **state-building**, not **regime-building**. We implicitly took for granted what he regarded as most problematic, namely, the identity and boundaries of the territorial units we were studying. And yet these have to be agreed upon and effective in order for any legitimate form of rule to persist – all the more so if that form is to be democratic since the freedom to contest the unit's

identity and boundaries is much greater than in autocracies. Moreover (and most embarrassing), there is no democratic mechanism for subsequently resolving these issues. The plebiscites that have sometimes been used for this purpose are a fraud since their outcome depends upon who is previously declared to be eligible to vote in them – and that usually determines the outcome. Almost all ‘real-existing’ democracies came into being within territorial units that were formed historically by non-democratic forces, usually war but also the fortunes of royal dynasties and their marriages.^{xiv} In the modern period, these units were presumed to be “nation-states,” i.e. to have a single or at least a predominant national identity and a reliable monopoly of the use of armed violence over a specific and unique territory. With the partial exception of Spain – at least initially, the countries we were studying in Southern Europe and Latin America seemed to have already acquired these properties and the freedoms of collective expression and political competition that came with democratization did not seem likely to call them into question.

Subsequent Observations *cum* Lessons

Both of Transitology’s initial assumptions *cum* hypotheses seem to have been justified. Uncertainty and agency do combine to make this liminal period an abnormal one and, hence, to justify its being treated as a distinctive form of politics. However, with the benefit of over twenty-five years of hindsight, I have learned that some of its derivative assumptions *cum* hypotheses need to be revised and restated.

The Revised Situation: The extent of uncertainty and agency has varied much more across the cases than expected. It was much greater at the beginning – and nowhere more so than in Portugal after its 1974 *Revolução* – but tended to diminish over time.^{xv} One hypothesis is that something like a process of political learning set in by which a few initial, successful cases, e.g. Spain, served as models for those starting later. With so many cases of transition occurring within the same timeframe, the diffusion of techniques (and even of diffuse confidence) would seem

inevitable – even across large cultural and geographic distances. A second hypothesis is that this decline in uncertainty and agency can be explained by the gradual ascendance of the two modes of transition that had been so rare in the past. Both ‘pacted’ and ‘imposed’ transitions insert important elements of greater assurance with regard to the emerging rules of the game and lesser room for autonomous action by incumbent politicians – the former because the negotiations between moderates within the former regime and moderates in the opposition tend to involve agreements on such things as the conduct of elections, the status of parties and the form of executive power; the latter because the autocratic rulers (or at least a dominant faction among them) are sufficiently in control that they can dictate both the content and the pace of events during the transition. Another unexpected element (which will be discussed below) has been the growing role of external actors, especially regional ones. These governmental and non-governmental organizations have been surprisingly successful in altering the incentives of domestic actors, both by rewarding pro-democratic behaviour, but especially by punishing those threatening a reversion to autocracy. Needless to say, this was most present among those polities that were potential members of the European Union, but the Organization of American States and MERCOSUR also played a significant role in preventing back-sliding. Elsewhere, regional organizations (or global ones) were much less relevant – *vide* the African Union or ASEAN.

The Eventual Outcomes: The odds concerning which type of regime would emerge from an attempted transition to democracy seem to have shifted dramatically. Considering only the cases we were examining, not a single one has (yet) suffered a manifest or sudden regression to autocracy, although several spent a long time in transition, some did have close calls, and a few have developed

symptoms of gradual deterioration. This is all the more astonishing when one considers that many of the factors that theorists had claimed facilitate (if not act as prerequisites for) 'real-existing' democracy were not been present in many, if not most, of these cases. Economic growth and employment rates have not always been consistently higher than under autocracy; social equality and income distribution did not always improve rapidly; trust in rulers often deteriorated; critical items measuring the "civic culture" of mass publics have declined – and still the minimal institutions of REDs have not been displaced. They have survived, if not always been respected and enjoyed by their citizens.

The 'dirty secret' seems to be that democratic outcomes may have been more frequent, but they have also been less consequential than in the past. Considering not only the expectations of those struggling for democracy, but also those of academics trying to understand the consequences of such a transition, one would have expected – based largely on the consequences of previous efforts at democratization – that such a regime change would have brought about much more significant changes in power relations, property rights, policy entitlements, economic equality and social status. This is not to claim that "nothing changed." In the realm of respect for human rights, more decent treatment by authorities and a sense of greater personal freedom, significant changes did occur and they are appreciated by citizens (even if they are often rapidly "discounted"). But in terms of those factors that are most likely to influence the longer term distribution of power and influence within the polity, recent democratizations have accomplished much less than in the past.^{xvi} Most importantly, they have proven to be much less threatening to the propertied and privileged groups that had previously supported autocracy. Once they realized that their class, sectoral and even corporate interests were as well, if

not better, protected by a democratic government than an autocratic one, a major incentive for reversion was removed.

The ‘Real-Existing’ Agents: We were unaware of it then, but something was already happening to both the nature and role of political parties in ‘real-existing’ democracies, just about the same time that our countries began experimenting with their ‘just-emerging’ democracies.^{xvii} In Western Europe, since the early 1980s, they had been losing members and voluntary contributions of money and labor. Voters were less and less inclined to identify with them or to vote for them consistently in successive elections – at the same time that less and less of the voters were even bothering to go to the polls. Hence, electoral outcomes were becoming less predictable and stable; new so-called ‘flash’ parties were emerging and then fading; governments by single parties or stable coalitions were more difficult to form – and to sustain in power. In public opinion polls, the prestige of politicians and trust in parties began hitting all time lows.^{xviii} The reasons for this decline are complex. Party ideologies are no longer so convincing and less and less distinctive from each other – except at the (growing) fringes of the system. Their symbols are less present in everyday life with the disappearance of the party newspapers and decline in party-affiliated social groups, which helps to explain why they have become much less significant in the process of political socialization and, therefore, no longer provide most individual citizens with their principal element of political self-identification. In summary, one can say that political parties remain indispensable for the formal organization of electoral competition at all levels of government, but that they have lost a great deal in terms of militants, followers, internal participation, programmatic coherence and credibility with the general public. In short, new democracies have emerged in an epoch which seems generically unfavorable to producing the sort of “New Prince” imagined by Gramsci.

Our assumption had been that what we called “founding elections” would produce and then re-produce a winning party or coalition that would rule for something like 10 to 12 years. This sort of hegemonic outcome is what prevailed in new democracies during the first half of the 20th Century, e.g. Finland, Czechoslovakia and Ireland after WWI and France, Italy, Germany, Austria and Japan after WWII. Exactly the opposite has been the predominant pattern during the last quarter of the century. The rule has become that whatever party wins the founding election, it will probably be rejected in the next or following one. I remember Guillermo inventing the concept of “the Suarez Curse,” after Adolfo Suarez won the initial election in Spain and then suffered the greatest proportional decline in votes in European history in the next one. Instead of being glorified for successfully bringing about a democratic transition, he was roundly punished for not bringing enough security and prosperity – and this has been a repeated frequently since, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Actual Modes of Transition: Given our decision to emphasize ‘possibilism’ rather than ‘probabilism,’ we consciously underemphasized the two most historically prominent modes of transition: revolution and reform – both of which required protracted mass mobilization, with or without extensive violence, to bring about a regime transformation. With a few exceptions – Peru in our sample, but South Korea and the Philippines in Asia, Czechoslovakia in Eastern Europe, South Africa in Africa and, most recently, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria in the Middle East – this sort of mobilization tended to occur **after** not before a transition had begun. Granted that in virtually no case was there a complete absence of mass popular acclaim for democracy,^{xix} but it was usually sporadic or ineffectual and the actual transition really began when elites – incumbents with or without challengers –

decided to initiate it, admittedly, often in fear of greater future mobilization from below. Needless to say, in the Transitions volume, we may have applauded the possibility of pacted and even imposed transitions, but we did not predict their increase (nor did we harbor any illusions about our capacity to promote them). In retrospect the shift in mode seems reasonable. For one thing, incumbent autocrats have become more capable of physically suppressing revolutionary threats or even of diverting reformist challenges.^{xx} What they cannot prevent is factionalism within their ranks. And this, depending on the relative balances of power – not to mention how their policies may have satisfied or alienated key support groups in the economy and society – is usually what leads to one faction's either taking the initiative to impose a (carefully controlled) change in regime or to enter into a (cautious and contingent) negotiation with moderate elements in the opposition. To this structural potentiality, one should add two more conjunctural factors: (1) the early, unexpected and well-publicized success of pacted transition in the Spanish case which encouraged imitation as far away as Uruguay, Poland, Hungary and South Africa; and (2) the accumulated wisdom among conservative supporters of autocracy that democratization in the contemporary context was not such a threat to their property, privileges or capacity to compete politically.

The New International Context: At the time that Guillermo and I were writing, the international context was 'passively' tolerant of democratization on the periphery, but only if it did not threaten to upset the balance of power between the Western and Eastern Blocs. Except for some activism by the Carter Administration with regard to human rights, neither the United States nor its allies had agencies that were actively promoting democracy.^{xxi} However, once the magnitude and spread of regime transformations had become apparent by the mid-1980s and, even more

important, once the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989-90 had removed the global security issue, the Western democracies rapidly equipped themselves with new government agencies and/or re-directed existing 'foreign aid' agencies for the business of "democracy promotion." Contrary to our expectations, the relevance of the international context increased monotonically with each successive demise of autocracy and attempt to establish democracy. The later a polity enters into this process, the more it is destined to benefit or suffer from the external intervention by already existing democratic governments. And this is by no means limited to government organizations. Each successive case of democratization seems to have contributed to the development of more non-governmental organizations and networks for the promotion of human rights, the protection of ethnic minorities, the supervision of elections, the provision of political and economic advice and the exchange of professional contacts. By now, there is not a country in the world that, even as it begins experimenting with democracy, is not literally invaded by a multitude of associations, movements, party and private foundations, consultancies and even illustrious personalities from the international environment. Whether this intertwined network of governmental (GOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has made some contribution to the fact that there have been so few overt regressions to autocracy is at least debatable.^{xxii}

The very existence of such an embryonic "transnational civil society" also seems to have influenced the diplomatic behavior of donor democracies. Those governments whose citizens have most supported these pro-democratic, pro-human rights NGOs find themselves obligated to support officially and more resolutely efforts at democratization in ways that go beyond normal calculations of "national interest". Traditional protestations of "non-interference in domestic affairs" have become less-and-less compelling; the distinctiveness between the realms of national and international politics has been more-and-more eroded. Even more significant in the long run may be the increased reliance upon multilateral diplomacy and

international organizations to bring pressures to bear on remaining autocracies or recidivist democracies. "Political conditionality" has taken its place alongside the "economic conditionality" practiced so long by the IMF and the IBRD. Global and regional organizations explicitly link the concession of credits, the negotiation of commercial agreements, the entry into the ranks of their memberships and so forth to specific demands that receiving polities take measures to reform political institutions, hold honest elections, respect human rights and protect the physical safety and culture of ethnic or religious minorities. In extreme cases, the different levels of bilateral and multilateral conditionality combine in such a fashion as to restrict considerably the margin for manoeuvre of new democratic leaders. Even more peculiar has been the spectacle of these leaders literally demanding to be subjected to international conditionality so that they can tell their respective populations that they had no choice but to take certain unpopular decisions!

The European Union, with its multiple levels and diverse incentives, was of considerable (but not sufficient) importance in the successful consolidation of democracy in Southern Europe.^{xxiii} Its role was much more significant in Eastern Europe where the conditions imposed for membership were much more specific and comprehensive than in the case of Southern Enlargement. No other region of the world has an institutional infrastructure as complex and resourceful as Western Europe's. The Organization of American States and the Organization of African Unity have both taken some steps toward providing collective security for new democracies and have relaxed to some extent their traditional inhibitions against interfering in the domestic affairs of their members. The Arab League and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have been conspicuously less vocal on the issue. What seems to be important – independent of the role of specific trans-national organizations – are situations in which a region becomes so saturated with this mode of domination that all countries have mostly democratic neighbors. This seems to mount pressures on the few remaining autocracies and upon potential

recidivists to conform to the regional norm, although the cases of Cuba and Haiti in Latin America demonstrate that the effect is hardly sufficient.

The Problematic Unit of Government: Democracy, or at least democracy as we have known it, has developed historically within the sovereign nation-state. Granted that this has always been a bit of a fiction in that many of these political units have strong and multiple identities within them, have not always had an effective monopoly over the use of organized violence within their boundaries and are often subject to economic and political dependencies upon foreign states, but the association has been so strong that many scholars cannot seem to imagine that democracy within any other unit is possible.^{xxiv} No one can doubt that it is preferable that national identity, territorial limits and sovereign authority be established before introducing reforms in political institutions.^{xxv} Moreover, there is no democratic way of subsequently deciding what should be the effective political unit. Self-determination of peoples or nations is an appealing phrase, but it tells us nothing about how this determination is to be made – especially in the course of a transition to democracy.

Several features of the regional and global context within which contemporary democratization is occurring have made this “fit” between unit and regime much more problematic than we imagined. In cases such as Spain, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union the historic imposition of centralized government had left a deep sense of resentment on the part of linguistic and ethnic minorities which was virtually programmed to resurface once democratic freedoms of expression and competition were tolerated. Here, contrary to our initial assumptions, “the national question” far outweighed “the social question” or “the military question” in importance during the transition, although it should be noted that, eventually and even after a great deal of violent conflict, solutions ranging from asymmetric

federalism to negotiated secession were found . What was less expected was that even much more culturally homogeneous and politically unified units experienced novel problems of the “goodness of fit” between their national borders and external powers. Some of this was benevolent to the extent that membership (or prospective membership) in a regional supra-national polity such as the EU that was itself a proponent of democracy (if not a practitioner of it) imposed serious limits on the institutional choices of national politicians.^{xxvi} More problematic, however, have been the constraints imposed by global financial institutions and multi-national enterprises which have left newly established democratic governments without the capacity to respond to the expectations of their citizens. These “democracies without choice” have had to cope with unusually high levels of *desencanto*. Some of which helps to account for the prevalent disparity in public opinion between generic support for democracy as the best form of government and disaffection with the *de facto* government as insufficiently democratic. One of the most surprising and pervasive *lacunae* in new democracies has been the slow and erratic development of what was supposed to be a pre-requisite for their survival, namely, a supportive political culture. As far as one can judge from the data, their citizens have been more cynical than civic in their declared attitudes and this may be due as much to the impotence of the unit as to the efforts of the government.

Conclusion

I return where Guillermo and I began. We knew that democracy is not a functional or an ethical necessity. It is a collective and contingent choice. Transitions to It are different from those to autocracy. The latter can be accomplished by a small, compact and hierarchically structured group (typically these days, a military junta); whereas, the latter depend on a complex process of cooperation and competition involving a large number of independent agents. Moreover, immediately after it establishes formal equality in the limited political role of citizenship, it must confront the informal inequality of the national and global socio-

economic systems into which it is inserted. And these inequalities are growing. Not only do they threaten the viability of democracy itself, but they are also antithetic to the very unit within which it is practiced.^{xxvii}

To our surprise, over seventy democratizations have been attempted across the globe since 1974. Fewer than we expected have failed outright, although many remain in an uncertain transitional status and could eventually regress to the *status quo ante*. Moreover, autocratic rulers seem to have learned from these experiences and become more skilful at making concessions. These hybrid regimes tolerate formal democratic institutions, but deprive citizens of the crucial capacity to hold their rulers accountable. And there are still many remaining unreformed autocracies, although recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa suggest that they may not be as culturally or religiously immune from the threat of democracy as had been supposed.

It will not take long for the newly emancipated citizens produced by these 'successful' transitions to discover that liberal, representative, constitutional democracy does not resolve many of their problems or satisfy many of their expectations. We are still far from reaching "the end of history" at which citizens will have become so settled in their institutions and approving of their politicians that they can no longer imagine improving them. To the contrary, I believe that once democracy has become such a widely established norm of government and no longer has in front of it a rival regime-type that is so markedly inferior, then and only then are disenchanted citizens going to demand that their leaders explain why their practices are so far removed from the ideals of democracy. Why is it that it is an increasingly remote, professionalized cast of politicians who rule and not the people? I suspect that democracy consecrated will become democracy contested -- that the triumph of democracy in the last decades of the 20th century will lead to a renewed criticism of democracy well into the 21st century.

*** ENDNOTES ***

- i Robert Dahl, Polyarchy (New Haven, Yale University Press,) p. 22.
- ii The most reliable and comprehensive quantitative assessment of regime transformation lists 75 attempts at democratization and 53 cases of cases of continued autocracy. Bertelsmann Stiftung (ed.), Transformation Index BTI 2012 (Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012)
- iii The Prince, trans. Harvey Mansfield, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985/1535).
- iv The contrast between the politics of movement and that of the trenches comes from Antonio Gramsci, The Modern Prince (New York: International Publishers, 1971)
- v Based on my crude calculations at the beginning of the Woodrow Wilson Center project, I estimated that 2 out of every 3 attempts at democratization in Latin America since 1900 had ended in a return to autocracy.
- vi "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe", International Social Science Journal, No. 128 (May 1991), pp. 269-284.
- vii The Modern Prince, op. cit.
- viii Which was not the case with those transitologists *avant la lettre* in the 1960s and 1970s who analyzed "the transfer of institutions" from colonial powers to their newly independent, former colonies. David Apter, a mentor to both Guillermo and myself, placed a great emphasis on the role of charisma, the (allegedly) exceptional powers of individual leaders during this crucial period. According to his neo-Weberian analysis of the Gold Coast/Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah was the forerunner of a series of "Princes" who were expected to bring parliamentary democracy to post-colonial Africa. The fact that they did not do so, and that they did not even manage to put together a viable hegemonic party, would not have surprised Gramsci. See his The Gold Coast in Transition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); also The Politics of Modernization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).
- ix He did not use the expression, but Giuseppe di Palma made this the major theme of his To Craft Democracies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990)
- x I NEED THE REFERENCE TO YOUR Comparative Politics article HERE.
- xi "Modes of Transition ..." FN vi.
- xii An obvious historical exception was when, in the aftermath of war, the victors occupied physically the territory of the vanquished and imposed by force their preferred regime type. And even then, when the victors were democratic regimes, the success of the effort depended on a protracted and consistent intervention in favor of democracy. Witness, for example, the dramatic difference between the cases of Germany and Japan and that of Palestine under Israeli occupation.
- xiii Robert Dahl has long been an exception in the discipline with his repeated emphasis on the successive 'revolutions' that have transformed the actual practice of democracy. Polyarchy (New

Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 248. For an up-dating of this notion of democracy as a 'moving target,' see my "The Future of 'Real-Existing' Democracy," in Bernard Manin in his "Métamorphoses du Gouvernement Représentatif" in Daniel Pécaud and Bernardo Sorj (eds.), Les Métamorphoses de la Représentation au Brésil et en Europe (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1991) also stresses this theme with regard to political parties, elections and legislatures.

^{xiv} The closest exceptions would seem to be those states that came into being *via* a violent revolution or peaceful reform movement led by self-proclaimedly democratic forces—usually in the context of liberation from imperial rule or in the aftermath of defeat in war. While in retrospect no one would question the *bona fides* of the founders of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Ireland and Finland, elsewhere these liberators either failed to create sustainable democracies or turned out to have autocratic propensities.

^{xv} The attempted transitions in the Middle East and North Africa that began with the events in Tunisia in 2011 may have reversed this tendency. All of these uprisings have involved massive popular mobilizations. When the incumbent autocrats divested themselves of their leader with little violence from below (Tunisia, Egypt), their transitions would be classified as "reformist" (despite the revolutionary rhetoric); where the dictatorial ruler responded with armed violence from above and triggered a violent response from below (Libya, Syria), the transition would come closer to what we termed "revolutionary." So far, there have only been ambivalent efforts in this region at either transition by pacting or by imposition (Morocco, Jordan).

^{xvi} HERE I NEED OUR JOINT ARTICLE FOR THE CARDOSO VOLUME. HOW SHOULD IT BE CITED? ALSO YOUR ARTICLE FOR GO'D TO BE IN THE SAME VOLUME.

^{xvii} For a substantiation of this argument with regard to Europe, see my "Parties are not what they once were", in L. Diamond, R., Gunther (eds.), Political Parties and Democracy (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 67-89.

^{xviii} Philippe C. Schmitter and Alexandre Trechsel, The Future of Democracy in Europe" Trends, Analyses and Reforms (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2004).

^{xix} Actually, there is one case: Portugal. The *golpe* by junior military officers on the 25th of April 1974 occurred in the complete absence of any prior popular manifestation and, ironically, it immediately triggered the most extensive and consequential mobilization of all recent cases of democratization. My article

^{xx} Unless, of course, they engage in unsuccessful military adventures. The transitions in Portugal, Greece and Argentina were all triggered by such miscalculations and they lead to a immediate decline in popular support and a dramatic increase in internal factionalism, both of which subsequently contributed to bringing down their respective regimes. One could even stretch this observation to cover the former Soviet Union and the more delayed reaction to defeat in Afghanistan.

^{xxi} The important exception to this was the three semi-public German party foundations: Konrad Adenauer, Friedrich Ebert and Hans ???. Their role in Portugal and Spain was largely clandestine and much more significant than I was aware of at the time. Needless to say, throughout the post-World War II period there have been direct interventions in the process of regime change by the secret services of 'real-existing' democracies – the balance of which seems to have favored autocratic outcomes, hence, a justified suspicion in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East of the motives behind such actions.

^{xxii} For a theoretical analysis of this question for the period based on a highly skeptical set of hypotheses about the likely impact of democracy promotion and protection, see Philippe Schmitter and Imco Brouwer, "Conceptualizing, Researching and Evaluating Democracy Promotion and Protection," EUI Working Paper, SPS No. 99/9, 41p.

^{xxiii} The importance of the EU in relation to democracy in Southern Europe was first explored in Geoffrey Pridham, "The Politics of the European Community, Transnational Networks and Democratic Transition in Southern Europe," in G. Pridham (ed.), Encouraging Democracy: The International Context of Regime Transition in Southern Europe (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), 99. 212-245. For a more comprehensive treatment of these changes in the international environment, see Laurence Whitehead (ed.), The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). For the emphasis on conditionality, see my "The Influence of the International Context upon the Choice of National Institutions and Policies in Neo-Democracies," in L. Whitehead (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 26-54.

^{xxiv} This argument concerning the necessity of "stateness" is most prominently associated with Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan in their Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), p. 16-37.

^{xxv} The notion that agreement upon the identity and boundary of the political unit is a 'requisite' for a transition to democracy stems from Dankwart Rustow's seminal article, "Transitions to Democracy: a Dynamic Model," Comparative Politics Vol. 2 No. 3 (1970), pp. 337-363.

^{xxvi} Hence, the famous boutade that while the EU was an important promoter of democracy in its prospective member states, if it dared to apply for membership in itself it would have to be rejected since it did not satisfy the democratic criteria that it was imposing on applicants. Indeed, several of its already member states would have failed the same test.

^{xxvii} For a more extensive discussion and documentation of the recent evolution of these socio-economic inequalities in relation to globalization, depolarization and democratization, see Terry Karl and Philippe Schmitter, "**DEPENDENCY AND DEVELOPMENT REVISITED: THEIR 'COMBINED AND UNEVEN' IMPACT UPON INEQUALITY,**" *forthcoming*