Reimagining Global Social Movements in the Perspective of Egalitarian Democracy

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Abstract
The analysis starts by offering a critique of the existing social movement literature and by suggesting the integration of critical theories of knowledge with theories and wisdom of indigenous peoples in order to develop an alternative knowledge of critical thinking and scholarship in social movement studies. It also proposes ideas about the need to democratize knowledge for better accounting for social movement studies, including that of indigenous struggles, for the purposes of formulating approaches that are necessary for enhancing a greater understanding of social movement theories and actions on global level. In the current crisis of global capitalism and neoliberal globalization, there is an urgent need to develop new insights for advancing the prospects for global social transformation, which is articulated by the slogan of the World Social Forum, namely, another world is possible. The piece specifically develops possible ways of struggling against and replacing bourgeois internationalism by globalism from below through advancing the agenda of an egalitarian democracy.

Keywords
capitalism, neoliberalism, social movements, knowledge for liberation, indigenous movements, elite democracy, dictatorship, egalitarian democracy, globalization from below

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Personal Reflexive Statement

In writing this article, I have been influenced by my life, political, and intellectual journey. I traveled from my birthplace, Oromia (Ethiopia), to Europe and the United States because the Ethiopian colonial government targeted me for imprisonment or elimination. My engagement in political activism when I was a college student to liberate the Oromo people from Ethiopian colonialism and global imperialism forced me to end up in exile and created for me the opportunity of pursuing a graduate study and becoming a professor in the United States. As an academic, my political activism and exile life have provided me new insights and opportunities for teaching and researching, among other areas, issues of social justice and democracy on global level.

In this age of globalization, neoliberal forces of multinational corporations, states, and interstate systems are engaging in “savage development” (Quan 2012) or “violent development” in peripheral countries (Rajagopal 1999, 2003, 2006). The main purpose of this kind of development is to accumulate more capital by dispossessing and privatizing communal or public properties for reducing the cost of production and for raising the rate of profit in order to overcome the structural crisis of global capitalism. Over all, “neoliberal globalizers” are attacking, dispossessing, and repressing the working classes, indigenous peoples, and other subaltern groups on global scale and causing human and ecological disasters. Progressive and humanist scholars and activists who deeply care for humanity are expressing their concerns about gross human rights violations and environmental degradation in the world, and trying to develop an alternative world system, which will be based on the principles of egalitarian democracy and social and material equality.

At the same time, social movements and all forces of social justice, equality, liberation, and egalitarian democracy are fragmented, decentralized, disconnected as well as theoretically disoriented, and lack a clear and practical guidance; they also lack sophisticated knowledge that can expose, discredit, and delegitimize the theories and actions of neoliberal globalizers and their organizations. I argue that the existing theories and knowledge are inadequate to help in mobilizing, reorganizing, and uniting all social movements on local, regional, and global levels by going beyond ethnoracial, geocultural or geopolitical, and gender–class barriers in order to empower “democratic globalizers” in general and progressive social movements in particular from below by envisioning a new world system that is beyond exploitation and injustice.

Broadly seen—as labor and women’s movements, national liberation struggles, and social/socialist revolutions as well as other social justice movements—social movements have been agencies of piecemeal social change or revolutionary transformation that have struggled against aspects of global capitalism and its political structures, institutions, forms of knowledge, and ideologies. The nation-states, intergovernmental organizations, dominant classes, powerful racial/ethnonational groups, multinational corporations, and patriarchal institutions have been producing
false or biased knowledge and narratives to naturalize and justify all forms of inequalities and injustices. But various progressive social movements have struggled to expose and discredit them by producing alternative narratives, knowledge for liberation, and new worldviews. Consequently, there are two forms of contradictory processes of knowledge production, narratives, and modes of thought: One form is associated with a dominant narrative and knowledge for domination, exploitation, and maintaining status quo; and the other one is associated with a subaltern narrative and knowledge for liberation, social justice, and egalitarian democracy. However, because of their domination over political economy, institutional power, cultural, intellectual, and ideological resources, the nation-states, multinational corporations, the dominant groups, and elites have considerable influence over subaltern groups and other ordinary people. Despite the fact that various social movements have introduced some social reforms, they have failed to develop a necessary critical theory and knowledge for human liberation and an ideology that can overthrow the dominant worldview in order to produce a new politico-economic paradigm, one that facilitates the emergence of participatory and egalitarian democracy.

Most often, these movements have been gradually incorporated into the nation-state or captured state power and have become an integral part of the capitalist world system. As a result, social movements have been only successful in introducing limited changes and reforms that are unable to go beyond the parameters of global capitalism. Further, the failures of elite democracy and the socialist and national liberation projects in solving the problems of all forms social inequalities, massive poverty, and other forms injustice require global transformation from below in order to build a better world. The increasing crises of the capitalist world system—the possible depletion of the world’s valuable resources, global financial and ecological crises, growing social inequality, the intensification of terrorism from above and below, and the declining of material resources for ordinary people—indicate the possible paradigmatic shifts that are shaping the prospects for advancing new and system-transformative modes of thought, knowledge, and action.

Learning from the past limitations of various social movements, progressive forces and contemporary social movements need to develop an alternative knowledge and a critical ideology that can help in reimagining a new world order beyond domination and exploitation. First, this article critiques social movement literature and provides theoretical insights for the analysis. Second, it develops background information on the evolution of diverse social movements and their accomplishments and failures. Third, since the existing theories of social movements such as resource mobilization (RMT), political process (PPT), framing and social construction (FSCT), and new social movement (NSMT) are neither well integrated nor fully developed, this piece attempts to suggest how to overcome these challenges by explaining how critical academic inquiry and knowledge will be better conceived to analyze the work of social movements.

Fourth, the piece forwards the insights that emphasize the need to advance the democratization of knowledge. Such insights better account for indigenous
movements and their knowledge that promote the horizontal forms of organizations and foster a greater understanding of world systemic divisions or geocultures in social movement theories. Fifth, by explaining the processes of exploitation and dehumanization, this article suggests possible ways of challenging and overcoming the theories and ideologies and practices of political absolutism or dictatorship, elite democracy, and the vertical organization of societies that maintain oppressive social systems and exploitation. Finally, the piece proposes how to envision a participatory and egalitarian democracy that can help in balancing the interests of individuals and societies in order to control or destroy the systems of repression, domination, and exploitation. It also explores how to replace vertical organizations or institutions by horizontal one by learning from certain democratic indigenous peoples and by imagining egalitarian societies based on the principles of egalitarian democracy and social and material equality.

Theoretical Insights on Social Movements

This work draws from an analytical framework that emerges from theories of social movements, the world system, and globalization. It combines a structural approach to global social change such as globalization, neoliberalism, and capital accumulation with a social constructionist model of human agency of social movements. Scholars and activists do not formulate theories in social vacuums. Social and political actions inform theories, and theories influence actions. These realities have facilitated conditions for the development of various social movement theories. As Aziz Choudry (2015:19-20) notes, “upsurges in social movement studies research itself can be attributed to periods of widespread social protest and mobilization. These include the multiple worldwide movements in the late 1960s and the emergence of global justice, climate justice, and anti-austerity movements more recently.”

But for collective behavior theorists, social movements are social problems (Choudry 2015:43). Classical scholars of collective behavior such as Neil J. Smelser (1962) and modernization theorists such as W. W. Rostow (1960) wrongly considered social movements as abnormal and irrational or deviant. These theorists believed that the collective behavior of social revolutions and movements is caused by factors such as social breakdown, strain, deprivation, discontent, cognitive dissonance, ambiguity, and psychological frustration. Such theorists blamed the victims for struggling for their own survival and emancipation. The theory of functionalism that claimed that a society was an integrated social system that would fulfill various functions, including maintaining consensus and equilibrium to manage social tensions and contradictions, became obsolete. Over all, the mainstream classical theoretical models have failed to explain how the politicized collective grievances, political consciousness, and organizational capabilities could lead to the development of social movements and collective actions.
Progressive movement scholars and activists started to use neo-Marxism and conflict theory as alternative theories to explain the relationship among political power, conflict, and domination. Learning from the struggles of the colonized and subjugated peoples and other subaltern groups and oppressed classes, progressive scholars started to develop theories of social movements in the 1960s. Prior to this decade, Orthodox Marxists mainly focused on the struggle between capital and labor and considered the working class as the savior of the world and ignored or minimized the revolutionary potential of other subaltern groups. In the 1960s, RMT of social movement emerged by challenging the classical model of collective behavior and by asserting that social movements are normal and rational actors (McCarthy and Zald 2001:553-56).

RMT as a theoretical paradigm shift challenged the collective behavior and functionalist theories, which promoted status quo in society, by developing a conflict theory as an alternative theory. The development of social movements, political protests, and cultural or political conflicts in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated how classes, ethno/racial groups, and other groups struggled over conflicting interests of economic, political, and cultural resources. RMT expressed that social movements would pool together their resources such as skills, funds, labor, time, commitment, land, technic, and expertise and form organizations to advance their common interests (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Tilly 1988). This theory is based on the principles of conflict, rationality, and preexisting organizations such as religious, cultural, ethnonational and traditional ties, and interest groups, including labor unions, political parties, and voluntary associations. RMT primarily depended on political, sociological, and economic theories and paid less attention to political interests, social psychology, and other issues (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978).

The decade of the 1960s was an important period in the capitalist world system. National liberation movements flourished in the Rest and the West. The mainstream theoretical approaches of social movements have failed to explain how collective actions emerged. For instance, the African American movement developed in the United States in its reformist, revolutionary, and cultural phases (Jalata 2001). Influenced by the African American movement, diverse social movements emerged from progressive elements of white society. These movements included the Free Speech Movement, the Students for a Democratic Society, antiwar movement, countercultural and environmental movements, and feminist movements (Van Deburg 1992). Criticizing theory RMT, PPT emerged in the 1970s by explaining social movements in relation to capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, and state formation (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978).

PPT model criticized RMT for (1) downplaying politics and political interests; (2) de-emphasizing the role of grievances, ignoring ideology, and exaggerating rationalistic roles of movement actors; and (3) ignoring group solidarity as well as social psychology (Buechler 2011:123-40). Combining the traditions of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and John Stuart Mill, Charles Tilly (1978) emphasized the importance of ideology, grievances, aspects of rationality, the importance of social solidarity and
common interests, and the availability of political opportunities for social movements to emerge and develop. He integrated the Marxian tradition that recognizes conflicting interests, the existence of conflict, and the importance of organization with the Weberian tradition that stresses commitment to belief systems. PPT recognized factors such as the availability of material, intellectual, and cultural resources; the capacity for mobilizing these resources for collective action, the importance of the existence of preexisting social networks, organizations, and institutions; and the rationality of participants in weighing costs and benefits for engaging in collective action of social movements (Tilly 1978).

Similarly, Doug McAdam (1982) further developed PPT by identifying that RMT blurred the difference between the oppressed classes and groups and the established polity members, over exaggerated elite’s financial support for social movements, minimized the role of the masses in movements, lacked clarity on the concept of resources, and glossed over the issue of grievances. “PPT emphasizes the role of grassroots movement leadership, contending that there are frequently struggles between this base and middle-class supporters who see the movement as an opportunity to use or control it for their own interests,” Choudry (2015:46) writes. McAdam identified two necessary conditions for social movements to challenge the established political system. These two conditions are the structure of political opportunities such as political and economic crises and the strength of indigenous political organizations that are equipped by cognitive liberation and political consciousness.

Cognitive liberation has three dimensions, namely, the recognition of the illegitimacy of the established system, the capacity to overcome fatalism among the populace in order to believe in changing a social system, and the ability to believe that introducing social change is possible (Piven and Cloward 1979). Furthermore, another theory called FSCT emerged by criticizing PPT for giving a secondary role for collective grievances in the emergence and development of social movements. This theory focused on micro-level social dynamics and emphasized framing, signification, media, and social psychology. It also paid attention to both symbolic interaction and cultural theories that help in the construction of meaning and understanding of grievances, motivations, recruitment process, and identity formation.

FSCT identified three categories and focuses on them. The three categories are (1) the process through which social movements frame grievances as injustice and illegitimate and require a collective challenge; (2) the recognition of movements such as status and identity politics, religious movements, lifestyle interests, and environmental concerns; and (3) the necessity to understand the role of meaning and signification (Buechler 2011:145-59). By focusing on micro-level analysis, FSCT emphasizes the importance of cognitive liberation for politicizing grievances. Cognitive liberation allows people to integrate individual interests, values, and beliefs with the activities, goals, and ideologies of social movements.

When there is cognitive liberation or the transformation of consciousness and behavior, movements emerge. The process of the transformation of political
consciousness indicates that when movement actors do not recognize the legitimacy of a given establishment, they may organize and engage in collective action. Most political process theorists focus on structural factors of political opportunity and organization and paid less attention to subjective factors such as cognitive liberation. Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina (1982:6-9) recognized the importance of micromobilization and cognitive liberation and identified the role of ideas and political consciousness in shaping collective action. In micromobilization, know-how is very important, and it includes “a repertoire of knowledge about how to engage in collective action along with the skills to apply that knowledge” (Buechler 2011:144).

Framing and micro-level analyzing are important in convincing people to mobilize and organize. Organizing people requires building loyalty, managing the logistics of collective action, mediating internal conflict, and framing and politicizing grievances in relation to structural factors (Gamson et al. 1982:6-9). Referring to the theoretical framework of Ervin Goffman, Steven M. Buechler (2011:146) defines framing as an “interpretive schemata that people use to identify, label, and render meaningful events in their lives. Frames allow people to organize experiences and guide actions, both in everyday life and in social movements.”

The dominant classes and groups in the capitalist world system most of the times can control and exploit oppressed classes and other subaltern groups because they have the know-hows, skills, and knowledge as well as economic resources for developing central organizing ideologies that can be translated into organizational capacity (Jalata 1996). The development of the three theories occurred in the United States by expanding on classical revolutionary theories (see below) because the United States, the hegemonic world power, became the hotbeds of conflicts, struggles, and ideological innovations in the 1960s to challenge and change American apartheid, sexist, and classist democracy one way or the other. Social movement theories refuted mainstream theories; they also exposed the deficiencies of modernization theory and Orthodox Marxism, which are Euro-American centric and reductionist.

Furthermore, NSMT emerged in Europe in the 1970s claiming that people consciously construct their collective identities based on their cultural values, lifestyles, and ideologies (Melucci 1980, 1989; Touraine 1981). NSMT asserted that the analysis of Orthodox Marxism that focused on the contradictions of capitalism did not adequately explain the essence of NSMT such as peace, environmental, and women’s movements that emerged from middle class rather than the working class in Europe (Choudry 2015:46). The demands of NSMT were not limited to economic issues but included issues of culture, quality of life, democracy, peace, environment, and identities.

Of course, the issue of culture is not yet adequately addressed by social movement theories. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) expanded on Karl Marx’s use of money capital from a narrowly conceived economic category of monetary exchange for profit to cultural capital and social capital to demonstrate how these forms of capital can be invested to secure material and social benefits and upward generational and
intergeneration social mobility for dominant classes and social groups. Bourdieu identifies three main forms of capital, namely, economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital: “economic capital ... is ... directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of private property rights; ... cultural capital ... is convertible ... into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of [position of power] and educational qualifications; and ... social capital, made of social obligations (‘connections’) ... is convertible ... into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility.” I believe that the issue of culture, particularly cultural capital, should be one important element in social movement theory.

Despite their weaknesses, social movement theories are relevant because they are addressing the issue of expanding democracy through the struggles and actions of groups and/or classes who have been negatively affected by the capitalist world system and its political structures. Debates among the framers of RMT, PPT, FSCT, and NSMT have enriched our knowledge on theories of social movements by focusing on different issues that are directly or indirectly related to social movements. The analyses of progressive social movement theorists are complementary despite the fact that their focuses have been different in explaining how social movements emerged, developed, and caused social changes. The critical integration of these diverse approaches to social movement theories can help in reducing the rigid focus on political economy or culture and objective or subjective factors.

Of course, some theories of social movements focus on politics and others deal with political economy or culture. In real life, these phenomena are interconnected and inseparable, and we must not confuse analysis with the social reality on the ground. Diverse theories and approaches are needed to deal with the complex societies, cultures, and the capitalists world system. Accepting the principle of the struggle for knowledge democracy, there is an urgent need to further synthesize and critically integrate progressive social movement theories. Going beyond those social movement theories that developed in core countries, democratic globalizers from below should expand the dialogue between theorists of the West and the Rest. I will come back to this issue later.

The Evolutions, Accomplishments, and Failures of Social Movements

For more than five centuries, both the agencies of capitalists and oppressed and exploited classes and ethnonational and other subaltern groups have been dialectically interconnected and changed each other. But, the capitalist classes, states, and their organizations such as multinational corporations and international institutions have played a determining role in alienating and exploiting the working class, terrorizing, committing genocide, enslaving, and dispossessing indigenous peoples both in the West and the Rest (Jalata 2013; Marx 1967). Generally speaking, the dynamic and contradictory interactions between global capitalism and diverse forms
of resistance that sometimes developed into diverse social movements have shaped the current global system (Agartan, Choi, and Huynh 2008).

Starting from the late fifteenth century, mercantilism successfully developed into global capitalism through the expropriation of the European actual producers, the dispossession of lands and other valuable resources of indigenous Americans and other peoples, the domination of international trade, and the enslavement of some Africans (Frank 1978; Marx 1967; Rodney 1972; Wallerstein 1984, 1988). At the same time, as Tuba Agartan, W. Choi, and T. Huynh (2008:47) note, “examining the European capitalist world economy and its engagement with other social worlds in the seventeenth and eighteen centuries reveals a remarkable range of movements, movements directed against fundamental processes of world accumulation and increasing European political aggression.” Capitalism as the racialized world system created and/or consolidated two forms of social stratification systems: One is class-gender based that has allowed gradual generational and intergeneration upward mobility for peoples of European origin and their collaborators regardless of their class origins (Jalata 2001). The second one has been the racial caste system (racial slavery and neoslavery) that has allowed little or no upward social mobility.

It is clear that these two major forms of stratification have privileged the white working class in the West and discouraged them from allying with the movements of nonwhite workers and indigenous peoples in some Western countries and the Rest. Knowing these facts help us from repeating the mistake of Orthodox Marxism that lumps together the social movements of whites and nonwhites to declare the revolutionary potential of the global working class in creating a socialist paradise. Now, we know that the working classes in the West, most of the times, rather than struggling for an alternative system of socialism or egalitarian democracy have mainly developed reformist strategies to achieve generational and intergenerational upward mobility and to be integrated into the capitalist world system. Let me briefly explain the evolution of the two stratification systems. The complex processes of the capitalist deepening (the intensification of capitalist activities in the West) and broadening (colonial expansion to the Rest) led to socialization and racialization/ethnicization of labor through separating the actual producers from their means of production such as lands in order to reduce the cost of production and increase the rate profit for the purpose of capital accumulation and concentration in the hands of the capitalist class.

Karl Marx (1967:17) explains how feudalism was dissolved in Western Europe via the process of original capital accumulation: “The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process. The history of expropriation, in different countries, assume different aspects, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and different periods.” Through the processes of broadening and deepening, capitalism has demonstrated its global nature from the beginning. Consequently, the colonial expansion to the Americas between the late fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, to Africa and Asia between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, to Australia in the eighteenth
century, the domination of international trade by Western Europeans, and the practice of racial slavery facilitated the emergence of the industrial revolution (Marx 1967; Rodney 1972). The development of Euro-American countries and other powerful countries was made through war, state terrorism, genocide, and massive human rights violations (Jalata 2016).

Before continuing the discussion on the impact of the industrial revolution, it is important to briefly explain the ways racial and other forms of exploitation have developed over time and impacted the operation of the capitalist world system and contributed to the development of social movements, as we shall see below. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, capitalism consolidated itself on the global level. But after facing structural crises in the first half of the twentieth century, global capitalism reestablished and strengthened itself under U.S. hegemony. Since the 1970s, with the intensification of the crisis of the process of capital accumulation and the declining of the U.S. hegemony, the West has started to promote a policy known as neoliberalism to revitalize global capital accumulation (Arrighi 1994; Harvey 2005, 2006; Quan 2012). As David Harvey (2005:7) demonstrates, through the policy of neoliberalism the neoliberal state has intensified the process of capital accumulation by dispossession of the economic resources and rights of the world population; the “fundamental mission [of the neo-liberal state] was to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation on the part of both domestic and foreign capital.”

Despite the fact that neoliberalism has negatively affected ordinary peoples in the West and the Rest, it has more severely affected nonwhite peoples. Peoples beyond the West are more targeted by what H. T. L. Quan call savage development because, more or less, they lack official or elite democracy that is practiced in the West. Quan (2012:4) asserts the following: “By savage [development] I am referring to a type of [development] that centers on expansionism, order, and anti-democracy, [and] . . . malnutrition, disease, state-organized violence, and environmental degradation. This is a symptom of a savage mind and a civilization, that can neither control itself nor define its destiny.” Neoliberalism intensifies the need to increase profitability through global expansion, dispossession, war, and state-organized terrorism. These practices involve diplomacy and war policies; therefore, Quan (2012:10) considers the U.S. war in Iraq as a neoliberal development strategy. Particularly, accumulation of capital by dispossession has involved state terrorism and genocide as the case of indigenous peoples illustrates (Jalata 2013).

Of course, the processes of capital accumulation by displacement as well as state terrorism and genocide have been integral parts of global capitalism from the beginning. The emergence of the industrial revolution that I have mentioned above consolidated these complex and interrelated processes. This revolution technologically, organizationally, and militarily empowered Western Europeans and their collaborators in the Rest and helped in finalizing the colonization of Australia in the late eighteenth century and Africa and Asia during the second half of the nineteenth century. Marx (1967:763) notes that further socialization and racialization of labor
through dispossession of the means of production and through colonialism resulted in “the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market, and with this, the international character of the capitalist regime.” All these factors involved state terrorism, war, genocide, the destruction of indigenous leadership, cultural and institutional destruction and the intensification of social stratification, rationalized and justified by the ideologies of racism, sexism and classism as well as the discourses of progress, civilization, Christianity, modernity, and development (Jalata 2013).

Indigenous peoples did/do not peacefully accept these abuses and crimes against humanity, and they first resisted/resist individually and collectively, and they gradually formed/form social movements wherever and whenever they could/can without developing an ideological clarity and organizational capacity that were/are essential for challenging and defeating global capitalism on many levels. More or less, states and corporations and other institutions have continued to dehumanize and exploit indigenous peoples all over the world, and their social movements have continued their struggles for liberation and social justice. Slowly, multiple forms of social movements also emerged in the West and the Rest as labor movements, women’s movements, social revolutions, and anticolonial movements. As noted by William G. Martin (2008:9), “significant clusters of movement activity existed across zones of the world-economy from at least the eighteenth century.” Of course, the whole world was not incorporated into the system in this century.

What did all social movements including trade unions, classic revolutions such as the American (1775–1783), French (1787–1799), Haitian (1791–1804), and Russian (1905–1917), Mexican (1910–20), and Chinese (1889–1949) revolutions and other national liberation movements or social movements accomplish? Did they fundamentally challenge the capitalist world economy in order to establish an alternative system, or did they revolt to get their own shares by removing the political structures that hindered their progress in the capitalist world economy? European colonial states and colonial settlers invented many countries by destroying indigenous peoples and dispossessing their homelands, and colonial states and later the descendants of these settlers in the Americas and South Africa revolted against their motherlands to form their racialized sovereign nation-states. The classic American Revolution was the main model for inventing such countries and states. In addition, this revolution established a sexist, class-based, and apartheid democracy.

But the famous classic French Revolution emerged in the center of the West to overthrow an absolutist monarchy by using the slogans of “liberty, equality, and fraternity,” that were interpreted differently by different classes and groups. For the capitalist class and its supporters, liberty and equality mean to have “legal rights” to own private property by dispossessing or exploiting others in order to accumulate more capital regardless of the consequences of these processes for the working classes and indigenous peoples. Social and material equality, liberty, and equality cannot be practiced in global capitalism. Despite the fact that the capitalist class and popular forces engaged in the French Revolution, far fewer radical changes occurred
because of the replacement of the absolutist rights by the capitalist rule of law. “In the Classic social interpretation, the French Revolution marked the turning point in the birth of capitalism,” Agartan et al. (2008:15) write, “signaling all at once the vindication of the Enlightenment, the overthrow of the feudal order by a revolutionary, secular bourgeoisie, the entrance of popular masses onto the world stage, and the creation of the rule of modern nation-state and its citizens.”

Amazingly, the French Revolution and its slogans had far-reaching influence in the West and the Rest. Paradoxically, the Haitian Revolution that was initiated by enslaved Africans and lit the beacon of hope for the enslaved and colonized populations in the West and the Rest of the world was influenced by these slogans of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Over all, the classic revolutions left indelible marks on the world. Because of the significant impacts of these classic revolutions, scholars call the epoch of the long eighteenth century “the Age of Revolutions” (Agartan et al. 2008:11). In Western Europe, while the capitalist classes were struggling to break down the power of the monarchs that monopolized state power and had absolute control over economic activities (Cairns and Sears 2012:29-30), the popular forces were struggling to dismantle social hierarchies and eliminate political repression and economic exploitation. The capitalists wanted to capture state power in order to get access to the economy and to limit the power of the popular forces; consequently, the emerging liberal democracies “tended to be nondemocratic, either authoritarian or based on highly restricted franchise, meaning that only a small proportion of the population could vote. Indeed, these early liberal states feared democracy, as they were concerned that real power in the hands of the masses would threaten the unequal power structure of the emerging capitalist order. They were liberal inasmuch as they gave individuals the right to control their own wealth and property” (Cairns and Sears 2012:29-30).

The absolutist states were replaced by liberal democratic states in England in 1689 and France in 1789. The liberal democratization process was different from the notion of democracy that was originally associated with the struggle of popular forces that promoted the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. This shows that the concept of democracy has been contested from the beginning. In France, the efforts of popular and revolutionary forces to destroy hierarchical class structures through reorganizing society horizontally and eliminating the legitimacy of private property in order to establish egalitarian communities were not successful. But, the reformist aspects of the revolution were successful in uprooting the French absolutist state that denied freedom to the capitalist class and popular forces (Anderson 1979). The capitalist class and its supporters tamed democracy through developing the concepts of nation, nationalism, and the citizen that have tied together all classes ideologically in a given geopolitical boundary called a country. Therefore, the concepts of nation, nationalism, and the citizens were invented with the emergence of the nation-states in the capitalist world system.

In the process of reimagining an egalitarian democratic world order, it is absolutely necessary to rethink about the social construction of the concepts of nation,
nationalism, the citizens, and country that reify artificial social boundaries among world populations. Originally, state nationalism emerged through restructuring of the absolutist state into the nation-state and developing bourgeois democracy. The development of state nationalism and bourgeois democracy in France and in other Western countries demonstrated the victory of the capitalist class over the remnants of the feudal class, the peasantry, and the emerging working class (Snyder 1976:77). With the elimination of absolutism and the emergence of the capitalist class as the new dominant class, the popular democracy that the working class, the peasantry, and other revolutionary forces struggled for was suppressed and bourgeois democracy was established.

While declaring this democracy, nation-states in the West had intensified the process of class, racial/ethnonational, and gender oppression and colonial expansion (Jalata 2010). State nationalism and bourgeois democracy conceal the contradictions that exist among the citizens of the nation-state, and the concept of the citizenship glosses over the real problem between the ideological claims of democracy and equality of citizens and the vast material differences that are structured into socio-economic conditions of distinct social forces within the nation-state. As a result, various social movements such as labor unions and other movements had fought against exploitation and the violations of their rights in the West. At the same time, there were clusters of social resistance to the broadening of capitalist world economy via colonialism. There were indigenous and slave revolts in the Americas; nationalist movements also emerged in the Balkans. Colonized or enslaved peoples were inspired by the secular ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity and engaged in liberation movements and demanded their rights. These processes led to the formation of new states such as Haiti (1804), Belgium (1830), and Greece (1831).

Similarly, the anticolonial resistances in India and Jamaica, anarchists in Europe and America, and waves of revolutions emerged. Furthermore, between 1848 and 1873, unrest emerged in Europe and social movements appeared in the United States; within four weeks, political upheavals in France, Germany (not yet united), Italy, and the Hapsburg Empire intensified (Bush 2008:53-56). These uprisings made many achievements such as the freedom of speech, publication, assembly, and association. Counterrevolutions and repressions stopped the progress of the 1848 revolts in Western Europe. But the struggles laid a foundation for the future more organized movements. The decades between 1848 and 1917 were significant periods for social movements; these movements immensely increased their challenges to capitalism by organizing themselves into unions, congresses, parties, associations, and brotherhoods. According to Caleb M. Bush (2008:52-53), “Beginning the period under serious repression, by 1917 movements—through competing and often contradictory strategies of reform, revolution, and all that falls in between—were vying for control of the state, even gaining state power. These developments constituted the most significant turn for movements and movement strategy.”

The repression of 1848 revolts in Europe did not stop the further development of social movements. The second half of the nineteenth century was the period of the
blossoming of social movements in Western Europe and North America. The modern labor unions emerged during these decades. For instance, independent labor movement emerged in France and Germany after 1848. In 1864, the First International Workingmen’s Association (IWA) was formed and provided a platform for radicals such as Fourier, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Marx. The IWA and the Paris Commune of 1871 increased their attack on capitalism. Both of them provided “an overarching ideology” for social movements (Bush 2008:56). Furthermore, the German General Workers’ Association was established in 1863 and the Social Democratic Workers’ Party and General Union of German Workers were formed in 1869. White workers in the United States, supported by socialists, started their labor movements in the 1860s to fight against capitalist oppression and exploitation.

The Russian revolutionary movement captured state power declaring “socialism” in 1917. After capturing state power, the so-called socialists began to support labor, revolutionary, and national movements around the world for sometimes. As labor and “socialist” movements continued their respective struggles, labor strikes intensified in France, Germany, England, Sweden, and the United States between 1873 and 1896. Also, anarchists and socialist internationalists intensified their efforts to establish an alternative system to capitalism. Reformist movements developed in Great Britain, Germany, and Australia and promoted “reformist parliamentarian socialism” or social democracy. The Socialist Party of America and the Communist Party of the United States were formed in 1901 and 1919, respectively. Germany’s Social Democratic Party and the British Labor Party were formed 1875 and 1906, respectively. Australia’s Labor Party that was established in the early 1890s won its majority parliament election in 1910. Between 1917 and 1968, several movements seized state power and introduced some reformist and revolutionary programs, but they gradually abandoned their lofty programs and reintegrated into the capitalist world system by consolidating it.

Consequently, social movements (radical labor, socialists, communists, and national liberation movements) had joined the capitalist world system by accepting and reifying the concepts of nation, nationalism, the citizens, and country. Despite the fact that capitalism faced “the age of catastrophe” between 1914 and the World War II and the Bolshevik Revolution emerged in Russia in 1917 demonstrating the systematic crises of the capitalist world system, oppositional forces failed to develop an alternative system to global capitalism and its ideological, economic, and political infrastructures. “In North America and Europe, labor and socialist struggles were fully institutionalized following [WW II],” Caleb M. Bush and Rochelle Morris (2008:84) note, “gaining access to state power and significant political and economic benefits at the very cost of their anti-systemic nature” (authors’ emphasis). More or less, the most prominent social movements such as movements of workers, women, and the civil rights movement in the United States achieved some of their objectives under bourgeois democracy without defeating capitalism in the twentieth century (Amenta, Chiarello, and Su 2010).
Accepting the discourse of the so-called national interests and promoting their individual and group advantages, the workers in the West have allied with the capitalist class and nation-states against the indigenous communities and other dominated and exploited peoples in the West and the Rest. As socialists and social democrats gained access to state power and political and economic benefits, they pursued their personal, class, and group interests within the capitalist world system. Similarly, despite the fact that the liberation struggles of the colonized peoples for independence put some strain on sometimes on core countries and powers, their achievement did not go beyond “flag” independence and their movements lost their antisystemic characters. In the mid-twentieth century and after, some former colonies achieved their flag independence and gained the status of neocolonial states to enrich their government officials and local and international capitalists at the cost of the dehumanized and exploited indigenous and other subaltern groups.

In the current era of neoliberal globalization, in the name of democracy, development, and human rights, the state, multinational corporations, and international organizations in the Rest are engaging in dispossessing lands and other resources while repressing and terrorizing indigenous peoples and their social movements. Balakrishnan Rajagopal (2003:3) explains that “it is not the lack of development that caused poverty, inflicted violence, and engaged in destruction of nature and livelihood; rather it is the very process of bringing development [to indigenous peoples] that has caused them in the first place.” The brutality of neoliberalism is causing massive poverty, famines, wars, terrorism, and massive migration in the peripheral world. Using the so-called international law and its political economic hegemony, the West has continued to dominate and exploit its former colonies; on their parts, neocolonial states have “come to colonize all life spaces in civil society and [have] effectively championed the interests of the global elite that runs the world economy. The democratic deficit experienced by global governance processes has been exacerbated due to the democratic deficit of [neo-colonial states] that act as the agents of the globalitarian class” (Rajagopal 2003:12).

Most peoples in the Rest did not even receive the benefits of bourgeois democracy and the rule of law because the West and their collaborators in the Rest have been against democracy in most countries. With the emergence of neocolonial states, capitalism and dictatorship have been integrated again by the alliance of Western imperialism and the intermediate class in the Rest. “The intensification of sharp inequalities within and between nations has been the reality of capitalist expansion in the Global South,” Cairns and Sears (2012:34) write, “and that has often been associated with brutal authoritarian regimes, not liberal democracies.” Furthermore, the NSMT or the “new” left that emerged in 1968 also failed to establish an alternative system to capitalism.

So social or revolutionary or national movements could not go beyond introducing some reforms in the capitalist world system. Generally speaking, social movements have introduced limited social changes in the capitalist world system without facilitating the emergence of egalitarian democracy, which can contribute to the
development of a fundamental social transformation by eliminating or reducing all forms of social inequalities and injustices. In former revolutionary countries like the former Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and others, peoples have even lost their civil and political rights and forced to live under total dictatorship. Betraying its revolutionary position and following the footsteps of the West, presently China has engaged in neoliberal agendas to loot the resources of Africa and others (Quan 2012). The past experiences of social movements teach us that human liberation is impossible under systems that practice exploitation and injustices while claiming the ideals of democracy, national liberation, and socialism. Then, what is next?

Theoretical and Intellectual Challenges in Studying Social Movements

We know more about global capitalism than about various forms of social movements that have struggled against its exploitative and repressive aspects. Marxist and neo-Marxist scholars and other critical scholars have adequately studied the development of the global capitalist system and its various stages from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries (Frank 1978; Harvey 2005; Marx 1967; Wallerstein 1976, 1983, 1984, 1988, 1989). Orthodox Marxism theorized that capitalism would create the whole world after its own image; that means industrialization would take place all over the globe dividing the world populations mainly into the capitalist and the working classes and resulting in two forms of revolutions: a bourgeois revolution and a socialist revolution.

According to this version of Marxist theory, the capitalist revolution would be necessary for a socialist revolution to emerge, and the proletariat dictatorship was prerequisite for the socialist revolution to occur. Karl Marx’s study of capitalism was based on critical social scientific research, but his idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat was not based on social scientific research. His theoretical assumption that the working class would play a leading role in individual and social emancipation and fundamental social transformation did not become reality. History and social praxis demonstrate that Marx’s prediction of the revolutionary role of the working class and its international solidarity to promote a global socialist revolution proved to be wrong. The opposite of what he predicted happened. The capitalist class has created global solidarity. Of course, the working class did not develop well in the Rest because the West limited the possibility of industrialization there.

As neo-Marxists theorized, imperialism would not necessarily lead to industrialization in the Rest, and there would not be industrialization and a capitalist revolution in this part of the world. Consequently, the weak capitalist class in the Rest was reactionary and incapable of leading a capitalist revolution. Therefore, they theorized that revolutionary intelligentsia and the peasantry would lead a socialist revolution instead of the working class. Despite the fact that countries like Russia, China, Cuba, and others engaged in the so-called socialist revolutions without the dictatorial leadership of the proletariat and acted as a counterhegemonic bloc for
sometimes, they later reintegrated into the capitalist world system. This so-called socialist bloc could not eliminate the extraction of surplus and the exploitation and repression of the working class and the peasantry. The regimes in these countries have become authoritarian and repressive. Although Orthodox Marxists romanticized labor movements and gave them the role of liberating humanity through a socialist revolution, proletarian internationalism, and dictatorship, these movements could not even fully defend their own class interests. In the name of proletarian dictatorship, socialist revolutions were aborted in the former Soviet Union, China, and other countries, and state capitalism has flourished in these countries. In the West, labor parties and unions have become parts of the capitalist political structures, and they even could not struggle beyond their economic interests. Currently, neoliberal policies are attacking their interests and forcing them to be disorganized and weakened. The working class has also failed to overcome the ideologies of racism and sexism and could not even form the unity of the working class within a given country.

One of the shortcomings of social movement studies is their focus on the experiences of Western societies. However, recently, a few scholars by going beyond Western experiences have started to study the role of transnational social movements and their organizations. For instance, Jackie Smith (2008) calling them democratic globalizers explains about transnational social movements and their struggles against neoliberal globalization and their institutions; these movements have demanded for popular control over international organizations in order to establish a democratic global system, which promotes human rights, social justice, and ecological sustainability. Her idea of conceptualizing transnational social movements as global networks that involve institutions, organizations, and individual activists that struggle for global democracy is innovative and helpful in expanding our knowledge bank by overcoming some of the current deficits in movement studies.

In addition, Smith and Wiest (2012) explore the role of global social movements and their organizations both in the Global North and in the Global South that struggle to reform and democratize intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and other institutions. Smith and Wiest (2012:17) note that these social movements and their organizations have developed the capacity to challenge “the basic logic and structure of the world economic and political system.” These authors have expanded the horizon of social movement studies despite the fact that international and intergovernmental organizations still mainly serve their financiers known as neoliberal globalizers and powerful states. Without any doubt, these pioneering studies advance our understanding of social movement theories and practices.

But still more research is needed to deeply understand what roles social movements play on local, regional, and global levels. Particularly, social movement studies need to focus on the understudied areas of the world. Although we can learn a lot from the experiences of Western social movements, it is impossible to adequately learn about all social movements without learning the conditions of social
movements in the Rest. Seeing the West as an independent entity implicitly assumes
that it has nothing to do with the Rest. Practically speaking, both the West and the
Rest are two sides of the same coin. Also, the Rest is in the West, as the case of North
America demonstrates. For example, indigenous Americans and African Americans
are geographically in the United States, but their socioeconomic conditions are
similar to that of the Rest. For these reasons, we cannot adequately understand about
the issues of social movements in the West without understanding those in the Rest
and vice versa.

As demonstrated above, the theories, research, and knowledge on social move-
ments are fragmented, incomplete, and underdeveloped. There are also other prob-
lems such as shortage of cross-cultural, comparative empirical and theoretical
research, and historical and interdisciplinary approaches that include critical legal
studies and cross-disciplinary work. Without overcoming such monumental theore-
tical, methodological, ideological, and intellectual challenges, we cannot adequately
broaden and deepen our knowledge on the structural and subjective factors of social
movements both in the West and in the Rest. One major approach of overcoming the
limitation of social movement studies is combining critical theories and knowledge
with the theories and wisdoms of indigenous peoples that expose the deficiencies of
mainstream theories, knowledge, and the ruling ideas of those who dominate and
lead the capitalist world system. Another major approach to reduce the deficits of
social movement studies is to intensify critical dialogues among progressive scholars
and activists of the West and the Rest in order to build a more robust transnational
social movement.

The Urgent Role of Progressive Intellectuals and Activists

There is more moral and intellectual responsibility on progressive scholars and
activists in the West to advance the cause of social movements because they are
large in numbers and they have relatively abundant resources than progressive
scholars and activists in the Rest. The first step to advance the causes of human
rights and progressive social movements is to overcome a narrow cultural thinking
and to develop humanist or human-centric liberation knowledge. This step is nec-
essary to develop theories and practices that demystify those knowledge and theories
that justify exploitation and injustice in the name of modernity, civilization, uni-
versalism, elite democracy, and development. Progressive social movement scholars
cannot introduce innovations to their theories and research without totally overcom-
ing their geocultural roots and distorted ideologies.

Ideology plays many roles in a society, and its essential function is to define and
promote the political, material, and cultural interests of a group, a nation, a social
class, a state, or other entities; it also “offers an explanation and an evaluation of
political, economic, and social condition; provides its holders a compass that helps
orient them and develop a sense of identity; and tenders a prescription for political,
economic, or social action” (Hybel 2010:1). In the ideological clothing of
universalism, progress, democracy, development, civilization, and humanity, mainstream theories and knowledge have hidden the massive human rights violations of indigenous peoples and other subaltern groups and have contributed to the perpetuation of underdevelopment, poverty, and suffering for the majority of the world populations (De Sousa Santos 2007; Rajagopal 2003, 2006).

Recognizing that these problems cannot be solved in the capitalist world system, some leftist and activist scholars have started to imagine an alternative egalitarian world order in which exploitation and oppression will be minimized or totally prevented. Such scholars also theorize about an emancipatory political project for the future and the possibility of recreating community-based societies by learning from the past of humanity in which egalitarianism and participatory democracy were practiced. For example, in recent decades, critical anthropologists have started to imagine the possibility of building an egalitarian society by learning from the experiences of noncapitalist societies and by demonstrating that domination and exploitation are not natural (Solway 2006). The work of Anthropologist Richard Lee on the San community in Southern Africa is an exemplary one. Similarly, a few scholars who studied the Oromo society have discovered the egalitarian character of Oromo democracy known as the gadaa system that existed before the emergence of contemporary democracy in the West (Baissa 1971, 1993; Legesse 1973, [2000] 2006).

Discussing the philosophy of Oromo democracy, Asmarom Legesse (1973:2) notes, “What is astonishing about this cultural tradition is how far Oromo have gone to ensure that power does not fall in the hand of war chiefs and despots. They achieve this goal by creating a system of checks and balances that is at least as complex as the systems we find in Western democracies.” The gadaa system has the principles of checks and balances (through periodic succession of every eight years), and division of power (among executive, legislative, and judicial branches), balanced oppositions (among five parties), and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent dictatorship and exploitation (Baissa 1993; Lepisa 1975).

When gadaa was an all encompassing institution of politics, military, defense, economy, religion, ethics, culture, and tradition, siqqee was used by Oromo women as a check and balance system to counter male-dominated roles in the gadaa system. The siqqee institution gave a political and social platform for Oromo women to effectively voice their concern and address their social justice issues (Kelly 1992; Kumsa 1997). The gadaa/siqqee system prevented the transformation of gender role separation into gender inequality, and women and men “had a functional interdependence and one was not valued any less than the other” in the system (Kumsa 1997:119). The processes and practices of gaadaa/siqqee and social development have been interconnected (Jalata and Schaffer 2013). The Oromo have a theoretical concept of social development known as finna, which explained phases and features of development in the Oromo society, and embodied the cumulative historical and recent changes that have taken place to produce a new social order.
Finna “represents the legacy of the past which each generation inherits from its forefathers [and foremothers] and which it transforms; it is the fertile patrimony held in trust by the present generation which it will enrich and bequeath to future generations . . . it describes a movement emanating from the inside, a developing of the inner potential of society based on the cultural roots it has already laid down” (Kassam 1994:16-40). It has seven interconnected cumulative development phases, namely, guddina (growth), gabbina (enrichment), ballina (broadening), badhadha (abundance), hoormaataa (reproduction and rejuvenation), dagaaga (development with sustainability), and dagaa-hoora (reciprocity, sharing, and cultural borrowing).3 Some Oromo activists and their social movements led by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) currently attempt to restore their egalitarian cultural traditions and the democratic political system that the Ethiopian colonial state and its international supporters have opposed and repressed (Jalata and Schaffer 2013).

The OLF should avoid the pitfalls of other social and liberation movements that won the war and lost the battle. It will truly achieve its objectives of defeating Ethiopian colonialism and restoring the Oromo democratic tradition by building robust civic and political institutions and by envisioning and developing egalitarian democracy. These are the only ways that this front can implement social, economic, and political justice without becoming a tool of the capitalist class and global powers. So the serious challenges that are facing those social forces and progressive Oromo intellectuals and activists and others that are struggling to establish an egalitarian democratic order are demystifying the theories and ideologies of domination and exploitation. This can be done by developing the knowledge for liberation that can facilitate alliances among all peoples to build grassroots transnationalism by challenging and defeating bourgeois internationalism and unjust globalization.

There are no blueprints in taking these steps. According to Bruce G. Trigger (2006:27), “The challenge of the present is for progressive anthropologists [and others] to draw on their knowledge of social behavior to try to design societies of a sort that have never existed before in human history: ones that are large-scale, technologically advanced, internally culturally diverse, economically as well as politically egalitarian, and in which everyone will assume a fair share of the burden as well as of the rewards of living on a small, rich, but fragile planet.” Tigger suggests the necessity of learning from the past to construct a better and just society where exploitation of subaltern groups and ecology will be avoided and where knowledge and technology can be harnessed to overcome the victimization of people by unjust globalization. As already mentioned, theories develop from social praxis. So it is possible to learn from precapitalist democracies such as that of the Oromo and the theoretical models of “real utopias” or “utopistics” of the current period to advance the theory and practice of egalitarian democracy.

For example, Erik Olin Wright (2006:96) explains the necessity of developing “a coherent, credible theory of alternatives of existing institutions and social structures that would eliminate, or at least significantly reduce the harms they generate.”
He explores how capitalist “institutions and social structures generate human suffering and obstruct human flourishing, [and] how [they] distribute the conditions for suffering and flourishing unfairly” (Wright 2014:333). A truly precapitalist egalitarian democratic society, which controlled its institutions and public and private resources such as that of the Oromo institutions and social structures, promoted social justice and political justice. In the model of real utopias, according to Erik Olin Wright (2014:333), the claims of social justice and political justice “call for a society that deepens the quality of democracy and enlarges its scope of action, under conditions of radical social and material equality.”

These conditions occurred under Oromo democracy from the sixteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. Oromo democracy allowed people to receive all forms of social justice and socioeconomic equality. In Oromo democracy, everybody worked for herself or himself and in collective, and nobody was allowed to exploit the labor of others. When social justice allows all people to “have equal access to the necessary material means to live flourishing lives,” political justice empowers people “to contribute to the collective control of the conditions and decisions which affect their common fate—a principle of both political equality and collective democratic empowerment” (Wright 2006:96). In overcoming institutional harms, there is a need to design an egalitarian modern democratic society. In this effort, we can learn a lot from Oromo democracy, egalitarian social development theory and praxis, and other precapitalist democratic traditions.

Progressive social movements need to struggle for developing an alternative development model to global capitalism, neoliberalism, and violent or savage development. This alternative development model must try to maintain the balance among nature, humanity, and environment on local, regional, and global levels by overcoming the exploitation of humanity and environment. There is an absolute necessity to develop technologically advanced and politically and economically egalitarian society through preventing the accumulation of wealth/capital in the hands of a few, which exploits humanity and environment. These noble paradigms cannot be practiced without totally uprooting the false ideology of racism, sexism, classism, cultural universalism, the ideology of linear modernity, and investment in destructive military organizations and weapons of warfare and nuclear armament.

My suggestions to progressive intellectuals and activists are also to go beyond their left liberal and Marxist traditions that limit their visions to the experiences of the West and study and learn more about the indigenous peoples in their own countries and the Rest. Then, they can find ways of collaborating with them to advance the struggle for human liberation and egalitarian democracy. Almost all social theories have limitations because of the specific geocultural roots of their thinkers and framers. Also, our scientific knowledge including social scientific knowledge is not value neutral because humans socially construct it. According to Third World Network (1993:485), “Scientists are strongly committed to beliefs and certain cultural ethos, which compel them to convert diversity and complexity into uniformity. In addition to this belief system and cultural ethos—which manifest
themselves in the propositions that scientists embrace—science has its own power structure, reward systems and peer groups. All of these [factors] combine to ensure that science is closely correlated with the existing, dominant and unjust, political, economic and social order of the world.”

It is not surprising that mainstream and oppositional social theories are mainly Euro-American centric because they have been produced in the West. Sandra Harding (1993:2) describes Eurocentrism as “the assumption that Europe functions autonomously from other parts of the world; that Europe is its own origin, final end, and agent; and that Europe and people of European descent in the Americas and elsewhere owe nothing to the rest of the world.” While learning from the past and present, progressive and activist scholars must overcome their specific geocultural roots and equip themselves with multicultural liberation knowledge in order to build grassroots transnationalism on a larger scale. Movement theorists must help all social movements to learn about one another and develop a broad alternative vision that exposes the fallacies of capitalist globalization and its neoliberal policies and to engage in struggle to create a better future.

To accomplish all these political projects, progressive intellectuals need to improve their theoretical and empirical research and knowledge by combining historical and interdisciplinary approaches that include all social sciences, critical legal studies, cross-disciplinary methods, and critical comparative studies. Without developing the democracy of knowledge, combing these approaches is impossible. These approaches can help in appreciating and learning from indigenous movements. Several indigenous movements in southern, central, and north America have emerged and developed since the 1950s to change their resistance struggles to protests and revolutions in order to restore their humanity and collective land rights; such struggles have enabled some of them to have access to bilingual and multicultural education, to introduce constitutional reforms, and to promote multicultural democracy by emphasizing economic and social equality and justice (Hall and Fenelon 2009; Van Cott 2007, 2009). According to Hall and Fenelon (2009:91), “Over the fifty years or so, American Indians have become emblematic of movements to reestablish their legitimate status as sovereignty.”

Native Americans in the United States and First Nations of Canada have struggled for self-determination. Other indigenous organizations such as the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, the Interethnic Association of the Development of Peruvian Rainforest, the United Multiethnic People of Amazonas, and others have participated in liberation struggles in Latin American countries to introduce some changes in individual and collective rights, in the areas of engaging citizens in public policy decision-making, and in holding leaders accountable. Some indigenous Americans in Latin American countries have rejected the capitalist model of development: “the visions embodied by Indigenous life projects entail a relationship between equals and an end to the subordination of Indigenous peoples” (Blaser, Feit, and McRAE 2004:4). Donna Lee Van Cott (2007:9-10) notes that Latin America’s indigenous “social movements and parties offer unique perspective
for addressing democratic deficiencies, as well as the capacity to mobilize social capital for democratic ends and to forge consensus on common political projects. They are expanding public expectations of democracy by insisting on greater participation, the reduction of inequality, and the protection of collective rights.”

Our knowledge of social movement theories, knowledge, and practices are expanding and improving. Balakrishnan Rajagopal (2003:249-53) articulates seven counterhegemonic narratives of social movements as a critique of development and sovereignty: First, social movements are challenging Western development models of rationality such as the role of the expert, progress or “catching up” with the West, and linear development from the so-called backward society to the so-called civilized and advanced one. Such movements are organized around liberation theology in Latin America, environmentalism, cultural revivalism in India, and Green movement in Germany; they also reject Marxist modernism. Second, there are several movements that struggle for the material well-being and culture; they struggle for cultural identity and human dignity. Examples of such movements include the urban squatters movement in Brazil, the movement of Black Communities in Colombia, the Working Women’s Forum in India, and the Zapatistas in Mexico.

Third, there are social movements that do not aspire to take state power; they are organized around cultural identity such as ethnicity, language, and ecology. “Their political agenda seems to be a democratization of their political institutions, the family, community, the workplace, and the society at large. Many identity based movements including feminist movements in India and Latin America . . . appear to organize themselves on this understanding of politics” (Rajagopal 2003:251). Fourth, there are social movements that use peaceful means by rejecting violence to challenge institutional politics. Fifth, the failures of liberal democracy and formal institutional politics have facilitated the development of some social movements that have struggled to refine democracy in the Rest. Sixth, there are social movements that are interconnected and formed cross-border alliances without having international legal framework. Seventh, some movements reject sovereignty-property roots of liberalism and use the liberal rights discourses. “Such struggles reflect a convergence between theory and action, that human rights scholars and activists have longed for but that has been generally unavailable. These [movements] show how individuals and communities can achieve their autonomy and self-realization by participating in shaping their own destiny without being constrained by theoretical boundaries” (Rajagopal 2003:253).

The Democracy of Knowledge and Knowledge for Liberation

Euro-American-centric theories and scholarship have suppressed or implicitly and/or explicitly distorted the cultures, traditions, and knowledge of indigenous peoples and other subaltern groups (McGregor 2004). Raewyn Connell (2007:368) notes, “Most theoretical texts are written in the global North, and most proceed on the assumption that where they are written does not matter at
all . . . . With few exceptions, social theory sees and speaks from the global North.” Amazingly, mainstream theories and knowledge have presented the destructive capacities of global capitalism for more than 500 years as something positive for indigenous peoples and others.

At the same time, they have dismissed the theories, knowledge, and wisdoms of indigenous peoples and other counterhegemonic theories. Indigenous “knowledge systems have been represented by adjectives such as ‘primitive,’ ‘unscientific,’ and ‘backward,’ while the western system is assumed to be uniquely ‘scientific’ and ‘universal’ and superior to local forms of knowledge . . . . The modern knowledge system ‘is merely the globalized version of a very local and parochial tradition’ arising with ‘commercial capitalism’ and ‘a set of values based on power’” (McGovern 1999:27). Euro-American hegemonic theories, scholarship, and the ruling ideas have ignored that the colonized indigenous peoples have been “a data mine for social theory” (Connell 2007:369) and the source of objective knowledge production. The hegemonic knowledge of the West and their collaborators in the Rest limits our understanding of the whole world by ignoring the geocultures of indigenous peoples and other subaltern groups.

Of course, there have been leftist scholars who have exposed the exploitative and oppressive aspects of global capitalism by focusing on the hierarchies based on gender, class, and race/ethnonation. However, because of their Euro-American-centric thinking and their limited knowledge of indigenous societies, and their evolutionary and modernist thinking, some of them have focused on capital–labor relations and, more or less, glossed over the problem of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, except a few cases, their works on indigenous peoples have been contradictory, incomplete, or distorted. Because of the rejection of multicultural knowledge and wisdoms and the tradition of abyssal thinking (de Sousa Santos 2007), Euro-American theoretical and intellectual knowledge from right and left could not fully recognize the full humanity of indigenous peoples.

Such scholars even ignore or gloss over their own precapitalist cultures and civilizations by focusing on their modernity. More or less, these intellectual traditions have seen indigenous peoples as social forces that cannot survive the onslaught of the process of the so-called modernity. In order to critically and thoroughly understand the problems of indigenous peoples in the West and the Rest, we need to stretch our intellectual horizons beyond the limitations of these theories, scholarship, and the ruling ideas of the dominant system. Therefore, I argue that social theories and scholarship that cannot address all of these issues are incomplete and contradictory or partially or completely erroneous. Unfortunately, most critical and progressive scholars from the West and Rest cannot see beyond their geocultural and state-centric lenses, and they just give lip service for the liberation of global humanity from exploitation and dehumanization. Liberating global humanity from exploitation and injustices requires developing liberation knowledge that incorporates the best elements of knowledge and wisdoms of all human groups and genuinely reflects multicultural and cross-disciplinary knowledge.
The state-centered knowledge elites have created artificial interdisciplinary boundaries among social sciences and also objectified indigenous peoples and other subaltern groups or have ignored them because of their subordination and powerlessness. M. A. Rahman (1993:14) asserts that “domination of masses by elites is rooted not only in the polarization of control over the means of material production but also over the means of knowledge production, including control over social power to determine what is useful knowledge.” The knowledge for liberation, however, attempts to replace history of domination by history of liberation by recognizing the agency of the oppressed and exploited classes and groups. “Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent,” D. J. Haraway (1991:198) writes, “not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his [or her] unique agency and authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge.”

The knowledge elites with support of states have produced “official” history that has completely denied a historical space for the subaltern groups in general and that of indigenous peoples in particular. Such negative views about the oppressed and exploited groups have prevented some scholars from understanding subaltern history and culture as well as their resistances and movements. According to John Gaventa (1993:27), “The power of knowledge industry is derived not simply from what knowledge is produced and for whom, but also from the growth of new elites who people the knowledge production process.” Some of the intellectuals who have studied subaltern groups have promoted the interests of the capitalist ruling class and its collaborators at the cost of the terrorized, colonized, oppressed, and exploited classes and groups. Others claiming that they are maintaining objectivity and neutrality have ignored the suffering of such peoples.

Euro-American-centric scholars and their foot soldiers in the Rest have dominated the writing of historiography of the oppressed classes and groups; such scholars have an ideology of the so-called cultural universalism and a top-down approach that have completely ignored or distorted the social and cultural history of the colonized and subjugated peoples (Wallerstein 1983). Cultural universalism is an ideology that the capitalist class and their collaborators in the capitalist world economy use to look at the world mainly from their own cultural perspective and to control the economic and cultural resources of the dominated people; it also helps in creating and socializing a global intermediate class by subordinating or destroying multicultures in the name of science and technology (Wallerstein 1983:83). According to Thomas Heaney (1993:41-42), “With the writing of history, knowledge became power, or rather an expression of power and a tool for maintaining it. History, and later, science, were frequently used not merely to understand, but to legitimate historically shaped political relationships and institutions.”

The emergent, critical, and comprehensive social movement studies can have a serious impact on developing the knowledge of liberation. Critical social movement studies must build this kind of knowledge by exposing the deficiencies Euro-American and state-centric knowledge that is called the knowledge for domination
and maintaining status quo. Social movement studies must promote a better understanding of the struggles of the dominated and exploited peoples and their histories and their aspirations. Progressive scholars who are involved in studying social movements need to debate openly and honestly to transform their scholarship and suggest ways through which liberation knowledge develops and expands.

Therefore, the building of democracy of knowledge is the first step toward the liberation of global humanity from exploitation and injustices by exposing the fallacies of the knowledge for domination and maintaining status quo in the nation-state and in the global capitalist world system. Going beyond the capitalist world system and studying all experiences of humanity without being limited by a modernist mind-set can help in developing critical theories and praxis that are necessary in building an alternative word system. Furthermore, progressive social movement scholars should challenge the problems of false cultural universalism and exclusionary relativism; they need to identify all positive and humanist values of all cultures and negative, reactionary, and oppressive elements of all cultures and build on the positive ones while delegitimizing those values that dehumanize and harm individuals and peoples.

These approaches can help in truly developing progressive global cultural universalism based on multiculturalism that is compatible with inclusionary and progressive cultural particularism. The fallacy of the liberal theory and practice of political equality and its false cultural universalism must be rejected because they exclude the praxis of economic democracy and multiculturalism (Mutua 2008). Progressive social movements should struggle by combining political democracy with economic or social democracy and by promoting a genuine global human rights movement through the inclusion of the best element of cultural practices of every society in the world.

**Envisioning Egalitarian Democracy**

Mainstream politicians and academics (both conservatives and liberals) in the West and the Rest mainly promote policies that encourage investment and profitability at the cost of the public interest. In the Rest, global capitalism promotes fake democracy or dictatorship that allows the officials of neocolonial states and local and transnational capitalists to intensify the exploitation and dehumanization of people through neoliberal policies and programs. In the West, elections are taking place just for formality without discussing substantive issues of full employment, health care, education, environment, and social justice (Cairns and Sears 2012). Consequently, less and less people are participating in voting considering politics as meaningless and absurd.

The endless crisis of global capitalism and the widening gap between the few rich and the majority poor are making people in the West to be dissatisfied in the present democracy. James Cairns and Alan Sears (2012:3) see democracy as “one of those words that gets used so heavily that we do not often pause to think about what it
means” and define it as “an open question.” These two scholars suggest that people should engage in the process of “democratic imagination” to expand their knowledge of democracy by including the concepts of popular power and self-government to satisfy their needs. Seeing democracy as an open question demonstrates that there are competing definitions of democracy. For those who control the major political and economic institutions, democracy does not involve the collective struggle for popular power and self-government (Cairns and Sears 2012).

For Cairns and Sears, democracy emerges from everyday life and collective action to make institutions responsive to the needs of the people; they use the concept of democratic imagination to criticize the existing democracy and envision popular democracy or democracy from below. Cairns and Sears (2012:4) suggest that this imagination must combine deliberate collective action “to improve the ways that human beings live together.” They also assert that democracy from below aspires to empower people to achieve collective self-government, attempts to fundamentally change society, and to promote the principle that real power emerges from genuine equity. But official or elite or liberal democracy is limited to elections, the rule of law, and certain freedoms and does not extend to workplaces, schools, families, organized sports, and personal relationships. According to Cairns and Sears (2012:4), “The idea that human beings deserve freedom, meaning that they ought to govern their own lives and communities, has indeed emerged from the resistance, in the form of collective action, and not simply the power of idea, that has led to the development of different forms of democracy at key moment in history. Regardless of the particular ways in which democracy is imagined, it is fundamentally about the daily practice of living together as humans. Safeguarding or improving democracy, therefore, involves action in the real world.”

Bourgeois or official democracy claims that it provides citizenship rights to people and then denies them equitable living standards and substantive democracy. Currently, official democracy implements the policies of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has started to roll back social citizenship rights that subaltern groups achieved by their collective struggles in the West. Neoliberal policies have installed lean governments by cutting public pensions and unemployment insurance programs, attacked collective bargaining rights of workers, and increased user fees in the areas of education and transportation (Cairns and Sears 2012:67-69). Neoliberals have blamed the welfare state for global economic crises, the declining rate of profits for corporations, for rigidly regulating labor market, and for increasing social benefits for subaltern groups through social programs. While claiming to become lean, neoliberal states have become more interventionist and pumped trillions of public dollars into failing private banks and corporations and engaged in massive spending on policing, prison-industrial complexes, and the military.

Most people in the Rest in general and indigenous peoples in particular are not even allowed to have official democracy. For indigenous peoples in the West, official democracies are illegitimate because they do not implement the rule of law to protect their interests. Generally speaking, many people in the West believe that
democracy is in trouble, and the problem increases with the further crises of the capitalist world system. If democracy is to benefit all, it must be reinvented to solve the problems of the ordinary people rather than serving as a tool for further capital accumulation for the rich and powerful groups. This reinvention requires that people empower themselves and their social movements. In envisioning and inventing a participatory and egalitarian democracy, we can learn a lot from the experiences of noncapitalist societies that prevented exploitation and domination through collective efforts and horizontal organizations.

Discussion and Conclusion

A more critical and productive dialogue will be needed between social movement theorists and world systems analysts. As noted above, Steven M. Buechler has started such a dialogue, although more explorations and discussions are needed from scholars of these two theoretical orientations. The reductionist approaches of only focusing on political economy or cultural factors or psychological factors must be avoided by using critical interdisciplinary methods and approaches, which enable theorists to analyze chains of interrelated historical and sociological factors. Furthermore, critically and thoroughly reevaluating social movement theories and practices and building on their strengths for developing new social movement theories, which reflect multicultural liberation knowledge and egalitarian ethos, are highly needed.

Specifically, integrating the best elements of social movement theories and practices with the theories and wisdom of indigenous peoples and their movements can help in advancing the praxis of a progressive global social movement in order to reinvent international law and to build internationalism from below. Since neoglobalizers are organized internationally, democratic globalizers and their social movements need to create global solidarity such as the World Social Forum for creating a transnational social movement and taking coordinated collective actions on global level for challenging and defeating neoliberalism and its policies. Such actions are not possible without developing multicultural liberation knowledge that helps in liberating the minds of ordinary people and progressive intellectuals and activists from all forms of social evils such as sexism, racism, classism, and cultural and religious chauvinism.

Above all, without critically and thoroughly exposing and challenging the fallacies of the mainstream theories, knowledge for domination, and the ruling ideas of the capitalist class and its collaborators, social movements cannot fully play a positive role in promoting egalitarian democracy from below. Because of their immense intellectual and materials resources and geopolitical positions, if they can overcome their Euro-American-centric paradigms, progressive intellectuals and activists from the West can contribute significantly to promote and advance progressive social movements on country, continental, and global levels. They have also more opportunity to participate in the struggle for social justice because of the opportunity of official democracy.
Similarly, progressive scholars and activists from the Rest, despite their meager material resources and their hostile political conditions, can contribute a lot through their comparative theoretical and empirical research and through participating in the struggle for social justice on different levels. Both progressive scholars and activists from the West and the Rest need to have critical, deep, and broad understanding of large-scale and long-term social changes by rejecting the modernist and evolutionary approaches and by studying noncapitalist societies both in the West and in the Rest to learn more about humanity and imagine beyond global capitalism.

People have constructed societies, and they can also remake them on egalitarian democratic principles by enabling individuals and groups to enjoy the fruit of their labor without being dominated, alienated, exploited, and dehumanized. Supported by progressive scholars and activists and by overcoming their narrow interests through developing the knowledge of liberation, social movements can ally with indigenous movements and other social forces that struggle for egalitarian democracy and an alternative world order. All these require reimagining about social movements by developing cross-cultural liberation knowledge and a critical ideology that looks to the past, the present, and the future in order to build a robust organizational capacity that can help build an alternative and better world for global humanity.

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Notes
1. News of the revolts of 1848 reached the United States and American Fourierists supported them and sent delegates to France. The Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention also emerged in 1848 as the beginning of the Women’s rights movement in the United States. Later, radical feminism and suffrage movements developed on the global stage.
2. Based on more than four decades of ethnological research findings of Anthropologist Richard Lee, Bruce G. Trigger (2006:25) notes, “social and political equality in hunter-gatherer societies was not direct expression of human nature. His evidence indicates that hierarchical behavior was actively suppressed in hunter-gatherer societies, where economic and political egalitarianism had great adaptive advantages, as well as in some of
the more mobile middle-range societies. Contrariwise, in more complex societies competitive behavior was supported and reinforced by the state.”

3. **Guddina** is a concept that explains how Oromo society improves itself by creating new experiences and adding them to its existing cultural life. **Gabbina** is the next concept that explains the enrichment of cultural experiences by integrating the cumulative past experiences with the contemporary ones through broadening and deepening the system of knowledge and worldview. Without Oromo democracy, there is no sustainable and egalitarian sociocultural development. **Ballina** refers to the expansion of enriched cultural experiences from one society to another through the reciprocity of cultural borrowing, based on the principles of social equality, fairness, and social justice. The cumulative experiences of **guddina**, **gabbina**, and **ballina** lead to the stage of **badhadha**. This phase is the stage of wholeness and peace. According the Oromo tradition, this stage indicates the maintenance of peace among **Waaqa** (God), nature, and society; theoretically speaking, there is no conflict, poverty, disease, or natural calamity because of the balance between **Waaqa**, nature, and society is maintained. The development of **badhadha** leads to the stage of **hoormata**. In this stage, people, animal, and other living things reproduce and multiply because of the availability of conditions such as availability of rain, resources, and peace. The next stage is **dagaaga**, which is the phase of development cycle that is integrated to maintain an even and sustainable development of society. The final phase is **daga-hoora** in which full development takes place in the Oromo society and expands to neighboring societies through reciprocity, sharing, and cultural borrowing.

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