

Democracy in Africa: Moving Beyond a Difficult Legacy

By Roger Southall



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Preface

The Democracy and Governance programme of the Human Sciences Research Council publishes an Occasional Paper series which is designed to offer timely contributions to debates, disseminate research findings and otherwise engage with the broader research community. Authors invite comments and responses from readers.

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Part One

Perspectives on Democracy in Africa

It remains fashionable to refer to the contemporary impetus for democracy in Africa as the ‘Second Wave of Independence’ (Adar, 2000; Graybill & Thompson, 1998), or as a major aspect of ‘African renaissance’ (Legum, 1999; Ajulu, 2001). Any such terms embody two major meanings. First, the disastrous failure of democratisation efforts following political independence in the 1960s; and second, the umbilical relationship between social and economic development and democratisation if the latter is to take genuine root in a continent which is mired in debilitating poverty. Indeed, the widespread view that Africa is ‘trying again’ after a disastrous ‘false start’ (Dumont, 1966) points not only to how a paradigm of democratisation has assumed primacy in analysis of the continent’s condition since the early 1990s, but how that paradigm has become inextricably entangled with political and intellectual activism. Indeed, the urgency of democratisation debates flows not only from the desperate condition of the mass of Africa’s people, but also from the fact that, whilst on the one hand, ‘democratisation’ has in essence replaced Marxism as both explanatory device and panacea, it has on the other been appropriated as goal and tool by Western policy agendas.

Democratisation in Africa: the first wave

Early approaches to democratisation in Africa were largely subsumed under the perspectives of modernisation and nationalism, which were in turn closely interrelated. The study of democratisation arrived on the continent in the 1950s and 1960s as an accompaniment of decolonisation, and in its most systematic and coherent form relied heavily upon ideas and approaches borrowed from American political science. For fairly obvious reasons, the study of politics in Africa was discouraged during the colonial era: not only were African peoples regarded as backward, if not barbaric, and hence unsuited to the pursuit of 'politics', which was conceived of in terms of a civilised liberal ideal, but 'politics' was also presumed to entail the prior existence of 'the state', which at most, was taken to exist only in potential terms under colonial tutelage. In any case, the teaching of political science was scarcely necessary in the production of the sorts of skilled and semi-skilled functionaries (clerks, typists, teachers, orderlies, and low-level civil servants) that late colonialism required, whilst because it would be likely to impart capacities for critical analysis of political life and to produce militant nationalists, it was viewed by colonial educational planners with deep suspicion if not open hostility (Barongo, 1983). However, when belatedly political science did arrive in Africa, in response to the decolonising formation of 'new states', it did so largely with all the baggage of American liberal commitment, with its diverse mix of idealism, universalism and (paradoxically) its blinkered ethnocentrism (Omoruyi, 1983).

Africa's 'new states' were assumed by early political science to be in the throes of a process of political modernisation, whose end state had an uncanny resemblance to political life in the industrialised west. In part, modernisation theory was a response to the failures of orthodox economics, which was criticised as failing to comprehend the complex interactions between social change and economic development, which American sociologists and political scientists argued could be

traced with some precision using frameworks derived from structural-functionalism. From this perspective, modernisation was viewed as taking place via the diffusion of 'modern values', through education and technology transfer, amongst the new African elites who were at the head of the struggle against colonialism (Leys, 1996: 8–10). Central amongst the new preoccupations of political scientists analysing this process was the study of the difficulties of 'political institutional transfer' which ran up against the embeddedness of traditional authority, especially as represented by the chiefs who, whether 'progressive' or otherwise, symbolised local particularities and the communal values of tribal life (Apter, 1972: 8–20). Indeed, the modernisation process was viewed by political scientists and nationalists alike as above all Africa's transition away from an inhibiting tribalism, often conceived of as simultaneously backward and demeaning, towards a modern nationhood which, buoyed up by rapid economic development, would represent sovereign, if not actual, equality with the former imperial powers. As Apter (in Hodgkin 1961: 160) pointed out, the slogan of the Ghanaian Convention People's Party, 'Free-dom' was taken to mean the 'freedom to enjoy the blessings of Western standards of subsistence' as much as it embodied ideas of political liberty, and 'democracy' was understood to entail a variety of social and economic objectives: 'the expansion of national output and national income; a more effective mobilising of labour; a more rapid development of power, industry and communications; the elimination of illiteracy and "backwardness" through mass education; the provision of universal, free, primary education; and especially in Muslim areas, the emancipation of women' (Hodgkin 1961: 160).

If the process of 'nation-building' or 'national integration' was the primary responsibility of Africa's modernising elites, the principal instrument was the political party, whose function was not only to 'articulate' and 'aggregate' public opinion but to engage in the promethean task of 'political mobilisation', of forging links between tribe and nation (Coleman, 1960;

Apter, 1965). Indeed, it was in the study of political parties that the supposed 'value-freedom' of western political science most easily cohabited with political idealism, whether the latter had its roots most firmly in the soil of Anglo-American liberalism or that of post-war European social-democracy, for their formation and development represented not only the most explicit embodiment of political modernisation (a secular if not 'charismatic' leadership, easily recognisable and manifestly borrowed structures, and progressive programmes), but also the condensation of heroic nationalist struggles for the achievement of the classic liberal goals of liberty, equality and fraternity (Duverger, 1954; Hodgkin, 1961). The very classification of political parties which dominated thinking symbolised the implacable advance of progress, for whereas cadre or elite parties were customarily formed as defensive reactions by traditional elites to the threats posed by modernisation, mass nationalist parties were the creations of the forward-looking elites who had appropriated the language of liberalism imported by colonialism, exposed colonial tutelage as self-serving, and honed the demand for African self-determination, sovereignty and racial equality. Significantly, however, whereas Western liberal-democratic thought was founded principally upon the rational individualism of Hobbes and Locke, African nationalism – which emphasised the putative solidarity of rapidly-forming, self-conscious, African national collectivities – had a far greater affinity to the romanticism of Rousseau, and his elevation of the 'general will' (Hodgkin 1961: 164). As a result, 'African democracy' was soon to have much more in common with the 'people's democracies' of the communist world than with the liberal-democracies of the west. This was to have grave consequences in later decades, when the hollowness of Africa's first attempt at democracy was to be laid bare by quite appalling, numerous and widespread violations of human rights by regimes which continued to claim popular legitimacy.

The fairly rapid political atrophy of the first wave of nationalist democracy in Africa, indicated variously by African governments' suppression of opposition and the shift to

one-party states, followed in numerous countries by the replacement of civilian by military rule, was greeted in two major ways. First, whilst there was some alarm at the potential for totalitarianism, authoritarian trends were more often as not conceived as a not irrational response by the modernising elites to 'the dramatic danger of disorder and perhaps even of regression' (Zolberg, 1966: 6). From this perspective, Africa could be viewed as suffering from too little, rather than too much, authority, although as the most astute students recognised, whilst authoritarian rule could prove successful in bringing about modernisation, the conditions for such success were likely to be absent in Africa, and in any case, the costs incurred were likely to be great. The alternative therefore lay in the pursuit of a more limited version of democracy, in which regimes would attempt to deal with societal stresses and strains by the sort of machine politics which characterised western countries before they became fully industrialised and modernised (Zolberg, 1966: 160), or by the development of institutions (not least the civil service and military) which were capable of containing the urban masses, whose rising expectations constituted the gravest threat to the political stability upon which industrialisation and modernisation (and hence democratisation) ultimately depended (Huntington, 1968). However, in contrast to such conservative responses, the second major response to the rising tide of authoritarianism was a reaction against modernisation theory and an embrace of radical or Marxist political economy.

Part of the problem for modernisation theory was that its intellectual armoury was closely aligned with American foreign policy. Some of the leading proponents of the approach were intimately connected to the US State, and were preoccupied with containing communism. Some (notably Samuel Huntington) were serious Cold Warriors, whilst others were just content to believe that modernisation would inexorably bring democratisation and economic growth. There was, as Leys says, a silence about the social nature of development which was cloaked by the doctrine of 'value-freedom'. It was

implicit that the development modernisation anticipated was not socialist, yet its capitalist character was not openly acknowledged. 'It was just "development", and was certainly not seen as prone to generate class formation and conflict, or as inherently uneven or crisis-ridden' (Leys, 1996: 11). Yet, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the outlines of an emerging African crisis were already manifest in the form of economic stagnation, political instability, authoritarian rule, militarism and not least, the rapid and highly visible formation of African privileged classes whose typically kleptocratic behaviour challenged their characterisation as a 'modernising elite'. Not surprisingly, African scholars were therefore increasingly drawn not only to the theories of the (metropolitan) New Left (which was simultaneously engaged in a critique of mainstream political science) but also, and more particularly, to a tradition of 'expository radicalism' in African studies which built upon early works by writers such as W.E.B. Dubois and George Padmore, who had sought to demonstrate how European colonialism had destroyed African civilisations and social and economic formations (Oculi, 1983).

Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) drew not only upon 'expository radicalism' but borrowed from Frantz Fanon (1970), whose work as a psychiatrist in daily contact with Algerian victims of French violence during the Algerian revolution had led him to the proposition that colonialism *underdeveloped* the personality of the colonised. This could only be reversed by the victim undergoing the catharsis of brutalising his/her brutaliser. Only a people who had gone through such an experience could hope to develop the political consciousness needed to keep their leaders from betraying the revolution following political independence. Yet Rodney owed even more to Andre Gunder Frank and other theorists of Latin American dependency, whose analyses and insights were now systematically applied to Africa. Building upon the proposition of Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah (1965), that the fruits of African political independence had been denied by continuing economic

dependence upon the former colonial powers (a theme which echoed Fanon's warning that local economic elites were apt to sabotage decolonisation by developing economic links with foreign capital), dependency writers stressed not only the external orientation of African economies (the export of primary commodities of low value in 'unequal exchange' for high value manufactures) which constrained the prospects for internal growth, but also highlighted how such 'underdevelopment' underlay the political power of the emergent African bourgeoisies who were the principal beneficiaries of 'neo-colonialism' (Leys, 1975). Even where, as in Nyerere's Tanzania, there were attempts to 'de-link' from metropolitan capitalism by pursuit of socialist strategies, state control of the economy translated into the development of a 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' whose interests contradicted those of workers and peasants, who were accordingly exhorted to engage in class struggle (Shivji, 1976). Meanwhile, even in African countries which pursued capitalist strategy (even if, for political reasons – as in Kenyatta's Kenya – it was dressed up as 'African socialism'), the lack of an indigenous entrepreneurial class with access to investment capital inevitably required that development be directed by the state, which in the absence of adequate foreign investment was the only agency capable of mobilising domestic resources and fomenting growth. Indeed, international economic orthodoxy agreed, and the early independence period was accordingly littered with neo-mercantilist development plans which featured the massive extension of the state's role in the economy. Hence according to Nellis (in Diamond, 1987: 573), public enterprises in sub-Saharan African countries typically accounted for as much as 40–50 per cent of manufacturing value-added and modern sector employment, and 20–40 per cent of gross fixed-capital formation and total domestic credit.

Whilst dependency theory and Marxism contributed much to the understanding of the patterns of African development and 'periphery capitalism', they posed as many questions as they solved, not least their inability to delineate realistic

alternative paths to development which were capable of overcoming the limitations imposed by international capitalism. Whilst there was an implied socialist alternative, it was difficult to demonstrate the existence in Africa of the indigenous social and economic forces which would carry such a revolution through. Yet throughout the 1970s and 1980s, African countries were on the contrary more typically dominated by ruling classes whose material interests were determined primarily by preferential access to the state, whose own growth was in no way matched by economic expansion. By the mid 1980s, the population of sub-Saharan Africa was, on average, considerably poorer than it had been a decade earlier: 25 of the world's 32 severely indebted low-income countries were in Africa, most sub-Saharan countries were having to devote anything between 40–82 per cent of their foreign exchange earnings to redeem foreign debt, the continent was no longer able to feed itself, growth rates were on average less than 3 per cent, high population growth was straining meagre resources and causing acute environmental pressures, and declining health status was by now compounded by the rapid spread of AIDS, which in middle Africa was estimated as affecting between 24–37 per cent of the population (Legum, 1999: 43–48; Baker, 2000: 6–9).

As Diamond (1987) points out, the particular bane of African national development was not the emergence of a dominant class as such, but its parasitic character as a political class feeding off the revenue of a 'swollen state'. 'The oversized, over-owning, over-regulating African state' had come to pre-empt investment in physical and human capital, had stunted production, crowded out private enterprise and given rise to systematic corruption, which as in the case of the Mobutu regime in Zaire, was simultaneously sustained by Western multinational corporations (keen to extract resources and gain contracts) and foreign aid and diplomatic support offered during the Cold War. The swollen state (or in Marxian terminology borrowed from Hamza Alavi (1972), the 'overdeveloped state') was also, by its nature, inherently

political authoritarian, for on the one hand, colonial experience and post-colonial contestations had left African countries bereft of institutions (effective political oppositions, a free media, functioning constitutions) capable of countering abuse of power and ensuring administrative accountability; and on the other, the centrality of the state to resource allocation had encouraged a concentration of political power which typically saw personalised regimes – which viewed the state and its resources as their own property – ruling by a mix of coercion and clientelism (the grant of rewards and favours to support groups, irrespective of the laws and regulations concerning public conduct).

Democratisation in Africa: the second wave

The early 1990s witnessed a dramatic return of multi-party democracy to Africa: whereas ‘in 1989, 29 African countries were governed under some kind of single-party constitution, and one party-rule seemed entrenched as the modal form of governance’, by 1994 ‘not a single *de jure* one-party state remained’ (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997: 8). Because of its timing, this second wave of democracy in Africa was widely perceived as the local manifestation of Huntington’s (1991) third wave of democracy globally. As Szeftel (1999: 5) notes, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (which symbolised the collapse of Communism as an alternative development model) preceded President’s De Klerk’s keynote speech in February 1990, which signalled the end of apartheid and heralded the transition to democracy in South Africa, by only a few weeks. Furthermore, precisely because more stringent conditions could now be attached to foreign assistance without fear of losing allies to Communist rivals, many authors stress the increasing importance of political conditionality and the emergence of Western demands for ‘good governance’ in contributing (with more or less effect) towards democratic momentum in Africa. Yet even though the surge of popular power in Eastern Europe was taken as severely undermining the legitimacy of one-party

and authoritarian African regimes, the broad consensus of both radical and mainstream opinion was that it was internal forces, in the form of the rise of pro-democracy movements protesting against authoritarianism, rather than external pressures which lay at the root of democratisation (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997; Bayart, 1993; Clapham, 1993; Szeftel, 1999).

Study of 'watershed elections' demonstrated how protest movements incorporated key segments of African populations (students, trade unionists, professionals, intellectuals, some business interests, the media, women, the urban poor, small farmers and the churches) and how their demands for democracy were resisted by the ruling group, their business associates and often, their external allies. (As Renou (2002: 17) notes, although France publicly encouraged democratisation, it utilised its aid flows to keep traditionally pro-French elites in power whilst reducing them to countries where they fell victim to popular pressure.) And, with regard to South Africa in particular, the combination of mass protest, declining regime legitimacy, and economic failure, was widely seen as creating divisions between so-called 'hard-liner' and 'soft-liner' elites within authoritarian regimes, hence propelling them towards multi-partyism and democratic transition (Bond, 2000). Yet a cautionary note was also sounded. For whilst the political transformation in Africa in the 1990s was widespread, it was also extremely uneven. Alongside those states which did undergo some significant process of liberal democratisation (involving a shift to political pluralism and overt commitment to human rights and the rule of law), there was a residual, second group of states which were largely untouched by the process, either because multi-partyism was well-established (Botswana) or because demands for democratic reform were not yet sufficiently strong to force reform (Zimbabwe and Swaziland). Meanwhile, whilst there was a third group of states where armed rebellions had engineered the overthrow of repressive regimes with the hope of representative government to come (Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia), there was also a fourth group which experienced state collapse, where central institutions

disintegrated under the weight of rampant looting, communal violence and civil war (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo-Brazzaville) or which fell victim to the predations of rival warlords (Chad, Somalia). As Szeftel (1999: 5) observes, the line between state reform and state collapse was often an extremely narrow one.

Despite the unevenness of the democratisation process, the latter was rapidly to become the central preoccupation of both academic observers and engaged activists during the 1990s. It was a concern which spanned the ideological divide between mainstream liberal and radical/Marxist analyses, because for both it offered significant hope of a better future for Africa. Yet there were, inevitably, important differences of interpretation and emphasis with regard to, in particular: first, elections, electoral systems and constitutionalism; and second, the relationship between democratisation and development.

Elections, electoral systems and constitutionalism Very considerable attention has been devoted by social scientists, and political scientists in particular, to the study of elections. During the period from 1950 to 1965, elections enjoyed a leading role in academic study, for the electoral procedure was used to determine, or at least legitimate 'the form, rate and direction of the decolonization process' (Cohen, 1983: 73). A large number of case studies spanned almost the entirety of Anglophone and Francophone Africa, as well as the Belgian territories (notably The Congo/Zaire) before, in the 1970s, severe limitations were imposed upon popular political participation by the shift to one party and military regimes. Even then however, an extensive literature analysed the structures, functions and consequences of 'one-party elections' which were pioneered in Tanzania in 1965 before being borrowed in countries such as Kenya (1969), Zambia (1973), Senegal (1978) and Ivory Coast (1980), and which, whilst excluding unwanted competition, none the less played a significant role in recruiting the political elite, legitimising the regime, and socialising the electorate (Hyden & Leys, 1972).

Subsequently, as Cohen (1983) notes (in a comprehensive review of election studies conducted before the early 1980s), the tendency for military regimes to *create* ruling parties and then to stage *façade elections* (Zaire, Togo, Benin, Sudan), testifies to rulers' recognition of the legitimization function of elections. The re-establishment of constitutions providing for elections in post-military Ghana (1969 and 1979), Nigeria (1979), Uganda (1980), Upper Volta (1978–80) and Central African Republic (1980–81), as well as the re-introduction of multi-partyism in Senegal (1976) indicated continuing faith of some African elites in the utility of elections. Nonetheless, the unevenness of Africa's electoral experience during these years led to a valuable distinction between categories of elections (competitive, semi-competitive and non-competitive) (Chazan, 1979) and for a more detailed elaboration of the functions of elections, whether they were competitive or otherwise (Hayward, 1987). However, whilst considerable interest was also aroused by Zimbabwe's independence election in 1980, it remains fair to say that, overall, the shift to one-partyism and militarism led to a declining academic emphasis upon electoralism as the majority of scholars transferred their attentions to the study of state, class, imperialism and underdevelopment.

The break of Africa's second wave of democracy reignited enthusiasm for the study of individual elections (for example, the case studies of eight 'watershed' elections in Daniel et al. 1999). Cohen (1983) illustrates how during Africa's first wave, analysts' theoretical concerns dealt principally with voter choice (overwhelmingly, the extent to which choice was based upon ethnicity), voter turnout (notably whether regime restrictions on political competition increased voter dissatisfaction or political alienation) and political participation (the role of elections in legitimating regimes and/or entrenching their domestic political control). Whilst these issues remained prominent as elections swept through Africa during the early 1990s, a significant gear change in thinking saw analysts rather more concerned to locate elections in the context of contemporary 'transition theory', which in turn was heavily influenced by the

four-volume study *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (O'Donnell, Schmitter & Whitehead, 1986). Apart from the concern to understand the causes of transitions, and to analyse why some had 'stalled' whilst others had moved forward, major emphasis was also now placed upon what would make successful transitions sustainable. Akin to the 'new institutionalism' that was addressing similar issues elsewhere, this resulted in a renewed interest in both electoral systems and constitutionalism.

Africa's electoral systems were in large measure inherited from the colonial powers. Traditionally, Francophone countries have elected their rulers by systems of proportional representation (PR), Anglophone countries by first-past-the-post (FPTP), or the plurality, systems. Whereas, for Francophone countries, following France, this had usually involved parallel elections for parliaments and presidents, most Anglophone countries had started with borrowed Westminster-style parliamentary systems before subsequently (in moves which reflected a growing centralisation of power and a weakening of legislative checks upon executives) introducing separate presidential elections. This historical divide between the way parliaments and presidents are elected largely remains to the present day. Nonetheless, a significant debate has taken place concerning the qualities of different electoral systems for two reasons. The first is that scholars, democratic activists and international agencies have pursued a serious interest in how to prevent abuse of elections by politicians (a concern which has given rise to detailed consideration of the merits and demerits of electoral monitoring) (Daniel & Southall, 1999). Second, debate around the specific electoral requirements of the South African transition from apartheid to democracy has brought about a renewed interest in electoral systems more generally.

A seminal contribution concerning an appropriate electoral system to best overcome the legacy of apartheid was made by Horowitz (1991), who in approaching South Africa as an ideologically and ethnically divided society argued a strong case for the adoption of an Alternative Vote (AV) system. Whereas a

plurality system would lead to overrepresentation of a winning party, and national list PR would disconnect individual representatives from voters and effectively exclude ethnic groups not represented in a putative majority coalition (Horowitz 1991: 200), AV would produce majority rather than coalition governments by encouraging vote pooling and ethnic accommodation, that is by forcing parties to seek out the second or third (party) preferences of voters. 'AV does not stand in the way of majoritarianism, but makes majorities responsive to the interests of others as well. This is an important conciliatory feature – and one that builds legitimacy – in a divided society' (Horowitz 1991: 202). However, as Pottie (2001) observes, the political actors negotiating South Africa's political transition were not in a position to select an electoral system that allowed such a freely structured arena of choice for voters, and whilst rejecting FPTP because of the potential problems posed by constituency boundary delimitation and gerrymandering, they opted instead for national list PR on the grounds of simplicity, inclusivity and the fact that no votes would be 'wasted'. (They were also influenced by the adoption of PR as a way of easing the transition to democracy in Namibia in 1989).

The adoption of PR was of major significance in that it represented a move away from Westminster-style, 'winner-takes-all' majoritarianism, in favour of an electoral system that provided for the inclusion of minorities, which in South Africa's case were based primarily upon ethnicity and race. Subsequently, the surprise appearance of Southern Africa as an arena of electoral experimentation provided fertile ground for important comparative work by Reynolds (1999), who, following study of elections conducted under plurality and PR systems in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, and in Namibia and South Africa respectively, came out strongly in favour of PR as more likely to foster power-sharing and inter-ethnic accommodation. In contrast, plurality systems were more likely to foster majoritarianism and ethnic polarisation. Most certainly, the drawbacks of the plurality system were to be demonstrated by Lesotho's elections of 1993 and 1998, which

resulted in wholesale seat victories by the winning party and the total exclusion of other parties from parliament, despite their gaining a sizeable proportion of the total vote. The political fall-out from these imbalanced outcomes has now resulted in that country's adoption of a mixed electoral system, in which the constituency contests will be supplemented by PR (Southall, 2003). Meanwhile, South Africa too is considering the merits of the reintroduction of constituency elections for at least a number of its MPs, so as to establish a firmer connection between voters and their representatives.

As much as the debate about electoral systems has moved beyond academe to become an increasingly significant issue in contemporary African politics, there is widespread recognition of the need to locate any electoral system into a wider historical and institutional context. For instance, both theoretical and empirical work has concluded that the combination of a PR electoral system with a parliamentary, rather than a presidential, form of government is most likely to enhance the prospects for democracy in Africa (Beetham, 1994; Southall, 1999). In a similar vein, Darnhoff (1997) ascribes the presence of a democratic culture in Botswana and its absence in Zimbabwe to the sharply contrasting nature of their decolonisation experiences: whereas peaceful negotiations between Botswana's political elite and the departing colonial authority provided a basis for acceptance of diversity and opposition, Zimbabwe's bloody liberation struggle fostered the new rulers' political intolerance and distrust of all opponents.

Such an appreciation of the legacies bequeathed to African states characterises the revived interest in constitutions which has been central to the shaping and study of Africa's multiple transitions. Whilst the nature of these transitions varied considerably, one of the most influential models was the national conference, pioneered in Benin in 1990 and subsequently pursued in other countries in Francophone Africa (Cameroon, Togo, Niger), whereby reluctant rulers were forced to yield to relentless popular pressure to allow for the redrawing of constitutions and the formulation of new rules for multi-party

elections (Joseph, 1991). Although equivalent processes have been variously waylaid or avoided by authoritarian leaders elsewhere, the idea of, essentially, rulers having to forge a contract with those they rule and to craft a new beginning has become widespread. Indeed, because prominent African political scientists (as well as other intellectuals) have been intimately engaged in struggles for democratisation in their home countries, they have been forced to confront not only the democratic potential offered by different institutional arrangements, but to consider if there is a sound basis for rendering constitutions viable. For many, this has been difficult, for the previously predominant Marxian perspective saw Africa's constitutions having fallen foul of what Okoth-Ogendo (1991) terms 'the power map' (whereby state elites appropriated themselves unfettered discretion over public affairs). In contrast, the new constitution-making tended to be dominated by a liberal paradigm which rested upon the twin pillars of limited government and individual rights and freedoms. As Shivji (1991: 258) has wryly observed, that has required the Marxists and Leninists to direct their analytical skills to upholding the positions of Montesquieu and Locke! However, an important outcome of the resulting debate has been a critique of liberalism and 'good governance' discourse as legitimating the right of Western powers to intervene in Africa whilst shielding the 'democratic' West from scrutiny (Abrahamsen, 2000). In turn, that has been linked to an insistence that for constitutionalism to take root in Africa it must recognise not only socio-economic rights but also collective rights, notably those of internally oppressed peoples (Shivji, 1991: 256). This provides something of a linkage to the important debate, in the South African context, of the potential of consociationalism (Connors, 1996; Lijphart, 1998).

Democratisation and development The concern to render constitutionalism viable has been closely linked to debates around the complex interrelationships between democratisation and development.

Demands for democratisation arrived later in Africa than the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). The latter were introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to numerous countries in the continent in the 1980s in a bid to restructure economies, basically by cutting back on the 'swollen state' (cutting state expenditures, privatisation, and so on). By the early 1990s, they had been joined by a democratisation agenda which called for the replacement of one-party and military regimes by multi-partyism and freely elected governments. Although, as noted above, most analysts suggest that the pressures for democratisation were largely internal, the linkage between externally induced economic and political reform was explicit. As noted by Woodward (1994: 125), for economic liberals, the connection was organic: 'markets are the ultimate in economic accountability; and elections in democratic accountability'. Although many such theorists were not prepared to go further than asserting, with Huntington (1991: 3), that 'few relationships...are stronger than that between the level of economic development and the existence of democratic politics', the core of the argument was put forward more succinctly by Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1988). They asserted that democracy was not, in practice, to be found in the absence of capitalism. Such a position has proved immensely troubling for radical Africanists, many of whom are still having to come to terms with the collapse of the socialist model internationally.

The standard response has been two-fold. First, the orthodox Western-institutional position has been regularly taken to task for defining democracy in minimalist terms, that is, in terms of the existence of free elections and multi-partyism. But this, it is regularly said, is an extremely impoverished version of democracy, for whilst the importance of the fundamental liberal freedoms cannot be denied, they are not likely to mean much to the mass of African populations who live in dire poverty. This critique has, of course, been greatly strengthened by examples such as Moi's Kenya, where multi-partyism did little or nothing to inhibit rampant corruption and

continued gross abuse of human rights, or Musuveni's Uganda, where a ban on political parties in favour of regime-sponsored no-partyism is tolerated by Western 'donors' because of the proclaimed successful implementation of structural adjustment. Such cases merely indicate what many observers are convinced has become more obvious – the severe limitations of liberal democracy 'in crisis-ridden, dislocated, marginalised, and impoverished economies' (Ihonvbhere 2000: 187). The solution, regularly put, is for African societies to become yet more democratic, for pro-democracy movements to base themselves more thoroughly upon civil society, trade unions, and human rights groups and so on to force through a more thorough-going reformulation of the state. 'This will include a restructuring of the military, a transformation of the bureaucracy, a revitalisation of the judiciary, constitutional engineering, the guarantee of basic rights and liberties, and the protection of minority rights' (Ihonvbhere 2000: 188).

Romantically, perhaps, 'democratisation' has come to replace 'revolution' as the radical panacea. However, analytically the debate may be said to have bifurcated into a struggle between the two poles of 'Liberal Democracy' and 'Popular Democracy'. As represented by John Saul (1997) in a highly influential article, these represent competing paradigms. On the one hand, the 'political science of democratisation', typified by the work of Diamond and Huntington, is based ultimately upon the political elitism of Schumpeter and the American theorists of 'polyarchy'. Market-economies develop whilst state-socialist economies fall behind. For democratic reforms to proceed without provoking crisis, the costs to privileged economic interests must not exceed the benefits. Competing elites therefore have a formative role to play in crafting 'pacts', whilst disruptive popular pressures need to be contained. In contrast, the 'political economy of democratisation' argues that such a focus on 'low-intensity democracy' abandons the pursuit of public purpose and fetishises the market. In Africa, market reforms have undermined the capacity of states to manage economies in accordance with social, ethical and political prio-

rities, and by destroying indigenous industries and domestic employment have accentuated social tensions. Ironically, therefore, globalisation and structural adjustment undermine rather than develop a basis for democratic peace and state-building.

Saul proceeds to argue that, in practice, the proponents of the 'political science of democratisation', along with the World Bank and fellow donors, have increasingly come to appreciate this paradox, and have accordingly resorted to a 'political science of development' which stresses 'good governance'. This recognises the need for viable state-like structures to maintain a minimum of order and legitimacy, and to in effect balance the contradictory pressures, of political opening and economic reform, of managing dual transitions. Yet such approaches tend to down-play the socio-economic policy content that such models are designed to ensure: 'governance' is presented as 'performance-oriented', akin to business management, designed in effect to contain disruptive popular pressures which might inhibit economic 'progress'. Whilst the emphases that such an approach place on both holding the African state to account and upon constructing democratic institutions capable of containing communal differences ('state-craft') are clearly vital (as demonstrated by the collapse of social cohesion in countries like Rwanda and Somalia), they can only go so far in humanising Africa's contradictions so long as the economic landscape remains so 'fertile' for throwing up 'pathological deformations'. In such a circumstance, it remains impossible to disentangle the twin issues of 'capitalism and socialism' and 'liberty and dictatorship'. Whilst the possibility of realising socialism remains remote in the present era, demands for democracy and equality whose realisation will require progressive social and economic reorganisation appear in country after country, and in the long term have to hold out hope for Africa.

Africanists are understandably less concerned with exploring the general relationships between economic development and democratisation which characterise much effort in contemporary comparative politics (McLean, 1994; Moore,

1995). As most such literature tends to associate democracy with national wealth (albeit with important qualifications), it tends to make depressing reading for those concerned with the welfare of the poorest continent, and to render pessimistic long-term prognoses when applied to single case studies (see Lane & Ersson, 1997) on South Africa, widely touted as Africa's best hope for progress. Saul's visionary perspective therefore articulates a radical optimism which constitutes an intellectual and political *necessity* for many engaged scholars, even if it is accompanied by a wider consensus which argues that, given limited prospects for successful developmental states in Africa, liberal democracy constitutes the only presently attractive option, 'since for all its limitations it provides some new opportunities for participation and accountability, albeit more in hope than expectation' (Woodward, 1994: 130).

The way forward

Wiseman (1999) has argued the grounds for 'demo-optimism' in Africa. Obstacles to democracy in Africa remain legion, and democratic progress is highly uneven, yet the continent's political systems are, overall, more pluralistic and more open than they were before 1990. And democracy remains on the agenda because there is no plausible alternative. How, apart from continuing pursuit of the debates outlined above, can such 'demo-optimism' be reinforced? I would suggest that there are three directions in which analysis could be profitably pursued.

First, there is need for more extensive concern with democratic accountability. At one level, this will require greater attention to the concept and practice of political opposition, a dimension of democratisation which has been largely subsumed under studies of political transition. However, establishment of the idea of opposition as legitimate, of *oppositions* as alternative governments, and of opposition as a vehicle for movement away from a politics of communalism towards a politics of ideas is central to continued momentum towards democracy in Africa (Southall, 2001). At another level, there is

growing urgency for debate about the quality of democracy, and how it can be measured. Baker (2000) has argued cogently for the expansion of conventional notions of accountability (revolving around popular judgements of politicians at the poll) to embrace rendering all those who make significant societal decisions, whether they are private or public, accountable to their relevant communities. All public power-wielding bodies, legal authorities and security forces, private power-wielding bodies (from corporations to churches), individual citizens (such as large investors), international legal and political bodies (for example, the United Nations (UN) and the African Union), and international financial institutions (the IMF, World Bank and 'donors'), should come under greater analytical scrutiny. Measures for assessing accountability of all such bodies are either available or can be developed, even though they will have to be supplemented by qualitative judgements. Their results will not only allow for systematic cross-country comparison, but importantly can be utilised to strengthen and reinforce the accountability of power-holders who affect the lives of ordinary citizens. As indicated by McHenry (2000), such a venture will require development of more sophisticated data sets for comparative enquiry in Africa, for the present measures reveal significant discrepancies and inadequacies.

A second, related effort should be upon the expansion of study of participatory democracy in Africa. Both the cross-national study of political transitions and individual country case studies of democratisation have tended to be largely divorced from examination of political participation at the grassroots. Focus upon democratisation at national level has meant that study of what this means for local government has been largely ignored, even though in many countries this is the level at which 'delivery', whether by national government, 'donors' or NGOs, has to be implemented. Whilst there has been voluminous writing and theorising about 'civil society' and its centrality to democratisation, there have been relatively few systematic studies of what ordinary, poor, African people understand by 'democracy' and how they view their rulers. In this

regard, Cherry's (1999) work on African political participation in Kwazakele township in Port Elizabeth carried out over nearly ten years and spanning the transition from apartheid struggle to life under the ANC remains seminal. Significantly, she demonstrates the co-existence within popular consciousness of a joyous embrace of liberal democracy and confusion when it comes to people's experience of the institutions of direct democracy (both party and municipal). Unrealised hopes of participatory democracy have led to growing cynicism and political demobilisation which pose long term dangers to the rooting of democracy in South Africa.

Finally, there is greater need for elucidation of the interconnection between democratisation and globalisation in Africa. Far too often the response of African intellectuals to the impact of globalisation has simply been one of rage. Hyslop (1999) protests that this is a product of a simplistic (and fashionable) notion of globalisation as merely the latest stage of the expansion of capitalist production. Yet the expansion of communications and information systems, changing experiences of time and space, and massive cultural changes towards new social forms which collapse any distinction between 'modernity' and 'tradition' compete as contenders with the economic for the driving forces of globalisation. African rhetoric which looks back to the autarchic logic of dependency theory only intensifies the continent's marginalisation. Instead, the way forward must be for African struggles against external economic domination, militarism, state repression and cultural imperialisms to link up with similar struggles elsewhere. Cheru (1996) admits that in the African context there is much hard work to be undertaken by social movements in developing a counter project to current oppressions, yet this is vital if they are to participate in international moves towards shaping 'a just, democratic and sustainable new world order'.

Africa's internal politics clearly need to be democratised, yet there is a growing consensus that that goal goes hand in hand with growing demands for transformation of a global distribution of power and wealth that is fundamentally undemocratic.

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Part Two

Perspectives on Democracy in Southern Africa

The winding down of the wars in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), together with the launch of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), are touted by certain leading politicians as providing a platform for the continent, and, more specifically, the southern African region, to make a 'great leap forward' both politically and economically. Indeed, it is a central tenet of NEPAD that there is not only a new vision and determination amongst African leaders to extricate their countries from impoverishment and exclusion from the fruits of the globalising world, but also that the African peoples have now arrived at a point where they will no longer tolerate poor leadership. NEPAD therefore declares the promotion of democracy and human rights as one of its principal aims, and has linked this to promises of the creation of an African Peer Review Mechanism which, under certain conditions, will measure governments' performance against clear standards of accountability, transparency and participative governance. Emboldened by Africa's new commitment to universal standards of good government, international investors will be encouraged to respond positively to Africa's desperate need for investment capital, thereby boost-

ing growth and enabling the continent to launch a new, massive and determined assault upon the poverty of its peoples.

This is all well and good. However, whilst the peace dividend in southern Africa could indeed serve to underpin NEPAD's bid for economic growth and development, it is by no means so clear that the region is embarked upon an unambiguous progression towards the consolidation of democracy. Indeed, there are deeply worrying indications that the democratic wave which broke upon the region's shores in the 1990s is now moving into reverse. Most particularly, it can be argued that a developing crisis of democracy in southern Africa is characterised by an increasingly explicit clash between an authoritarian culture of national liberation and participatory democracy; and by a closely related model of state power which, even if obscured under democratic garb, entrenches elites and promotes highly unequal patterns of accumulation and anti-development.

If NEPAD's goals of democracy and development are to be realised, it may well be that that will eventuate in spite of, rather than because of, the behaviour of the elites who are formally proposing them.

Liberation *against* democracy?

The post-Second World War struggles for national liberation, which swept away colonial empires throughout Asia and Africa, were some of the most dramatic developments of the Twentieth Century. These struggles took numerous different forms, yet they were all characterised by the rejection of racism and imperialism, and the demands of previously nationally oppressed peoples for sovereign equality with the colonial powers. The outcome has been the world we know today: a world-system which is composed of formally equal, sovereign states, yet which is simultaneously characterised by dramatic disparities in power and wealth both *between* states (most notably, North versus South) and *within* states (not least those now free of direct colonial bondage). In other words, in so far

as national liberation struggle was a struggle for the democratic equality of *people*, as opposed to the democratic equality of *peoples*, it is as yet dramatically unrealised. As has been pointed out by a pantheon of radical scholars and activists, much of the responsibility for this incomplete revolution lies with the workings of the global political economy which, especially following the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the state-directed socialism it propagated, has fostered increasing economic inequality (and indeed, is presently sucking more capital out of Africa than it is putting back in). Yet part of the responsibility, at least in southern Africa, appears to lie with the logic of national liberation struggle itself, for that logic appears reluctant (or unable) to engage with democracy, whose own logic it had subsumed. Or in other words, once having attained national independence, the inexorable logic of national liberation seems to be to suppress rather than to liberate democracy.

In broad terms, the national liberation struggle in southern Africa took place in two waves. First, nationalist movements fighting against colonialism gained relatively easy successes in those parts of the sub-continent which, given the post-war decision to abandon the 'burden of empire', were given away by Britain without much of a fight. These were overwhelmingly non-settler territories, of limited economic value, where in any case the metropolitan power was confident of being able to reap continued benefits through strategic investments, largely (although by no means exclusively) in mining and agriculture. Not surprisingly, in retrospect, although they cultivated many heroic myths necessary to nation-building, the nationalist movements concerned were undeveloped in the sense that their relatively easy conquest of state power opened them up to post-colonial domination by individual leaders such as Kaunda and Banda. When faced by the eruption of social contradictions or conflicts which had been *contained* by anti-colonial struggle, these leaders resorted to the imposition of an artificial national unity via the declaration of the one-party state. However, precisely because the national movements in

such countries had never really been required to develop much muscle in their struggle against colonialism (in the form of organisational discipline or ideological coherence), they were to prove susceptible in the long term to erosion from below, most particularly because the state-directed economics they cultivated ran foul of international capital. Subsequently, the remedies of structural adjustment, pushed by international creditors from the early 1980s, proceeded to accentuate internal crises of production and unemployment, thereby provoking internal opposition and calls for the restoration of multi-party democracy. The first wave of nationalist movements therefore eventually fell victim to their own contradictions and inadequacies, upon which somewhat fragile structures of democracy ('free' elections, multi-partyism and individual liberties) have been erected since the early 1990s.

It was in the second wave of national liberation struggle directed against a colonial power reluctant to depart (Portugal) and settler-dominated political economies which claimed (Rhodesia) or enjoyed (South Africa) political independence in which, because much greater determination was involved (not least in the form of *armed struggle*), that the authoritarian logic of the phenomenon came to greater fruition. This will be explored in particular relation to developments in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. It will be argued that where the authoritarian logic of the liberation movement has been enabled to become wholly dominant, it has had potentially or in reality drastic results, as demonstrated by the present unfolding of the historic tragedy of Zimbabwe. In contrast, where this logic has had to engage with, or is presently engaged with, a struggle for hegemony with counteracting forces of liberal as well as participatory democracy, as in South Africa (and to a lesser extent in Namibia), the outcome (i.e. authoritarianism or democracy) remains in the balance.

What is this logic of national liberation struggle, in which the baneful appears in the long run to overcome the benign? I would argue that it is made up of the following key elements.

Emphasis upon 'The Nation is One' It is a commonplace that the colonial powers carved Africa up into arbitrary units which combined and divided disparate peoples, and which restructured relations of inequality between them, to the relative advantage of some 'tribes' and to the detriment of others. The anti-colonial movements were therefore faced by the challenge of forging nations out of diversity and uneven development, a task rendered even more difficult where colonialism had imported immigrants from other continents and had arranged them in a hierarchy of racial advantage and oppression. Not surprisingly, therefore, precisely because it was a key strategy of colonialism and apartheid to *divide and rule*, the national liberation movements' response was to argue the 'oneness' of the 'oppressed nation' which was struggling for liberation. Yet, as much as struggling to *liberate* their 'nations', national liberation movements were struggling to *create* them. It was in this context that historic or structural differences between diverse peoples and races were suppressed, a context which also inexorably simultaneously reinforced patriarchy by denying the significance of inequalities of gender. Of course, even though the liberation struggle demanded the forging of a national(ist) myth (the creation, for instance, of a Zimbabwean 'people' where there had been none before), the reality on the ground of uneven development and racial hierarchy could not but intrude, in a form or forms which dangerously threatened any notion of a monolithic national unity or which demanded major ideological ingenuity (or contortions) to maintain one.

On the one hand, for instance, the emergence of two rival nationalist movements in the then Rhodesia, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), rooted amongst the minority Matabele, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), rooted amongst the more numerous Shona, were to engage in a struggle for nationalist hegemony. This resulted successively in a pre-independence alliance, the ZANU-dominated Patriotic Front (PF), forged in 1978, to create a united force which could push for victory against the settler regime; the decision of ZANU to fight the pre-independence

election of 1980 separately as ZANU-PF; the post-electoral formation of a government of national unity, in which ZAPU (and the settler party, the Rhodesian Front) served as junior partners to ZANU-PF; the subsequent dissolution of ZANU (PF)-ZAPU unity in 1982 and the former's deployment of the by now ZANU-PF-dominated national army (backed by North Korea) against so-called 'western dissidents' in a brutal campaign in which up to 20 000 people were killed; and subsequently, ZAPU's effective admission of defeat and its signing of a unity accord in 1987 prior to its agreeing to dissolve itself into the ruling party in 1989.

On the other hand, in South Africa, where the idea of 'African nationalism' was rendered considerably more problematic by that country's pre-existing constitutional independence and more so by the greater demographic presence of three 'racial' minorities (whites, Coloureds and Indians, the latter two of which were – like Africans – racially oppressed), and where there was no dominant African 'tribe' or group, the national liberation struggle as waged by the African National Congress (ANC) revolved around the construction of an ideology and practice of 'non-racialism'. However, although this was a construct forged around universalist values which assumed racial equality (in contrast to the racial inequality which was explicitly fostered by apartheid), it simultaneously allowed for a *de facto* racial coalition founded upon an African domination which was guaranteed by sheer weight of demography. Most certainly, the sensitivity of the ANC to the need to respect racial and cultural diversities if individual rights are to be respected and domestic peace maintained is one of the great achievements of the post-apartheid dispensation, and unlike Zimbabwe, there has been no hint of an attempt to move towards the creation of a one-party state, (if only because the existence of competitive multi-party democracy is one of post-apartheid South Africa's strongest international selling points). Nonetheless, the triumph of non-racial democracy is compromised by at least two tendencies. The first is the clear desire of the ANC

to centralise power, and to constitute South Africa into a dominant-party state under its own hegemony. The second is the willingness of the dominant African hierarchy to exploit the racial ambiguities of post-apartheid South Africa, by playing the 'race card' whenever that might appear to be convenient. This is most notable when criticism of the government, as evinced by white-dominated opposition parties, is dismissed as 'racist' (whatever its inherent merits) and intended to shore up continuing white privilege (Mare, 2001). Further dynamics and implications of this are explored below.

Of course, in the post-liberation context in former settler-dominated states, where key sectors of the economy remain dominated by a white minority (and to a lesser, although not insignificant extent by Indians), race becomes inextricably entangled with class. This offers the peculiar advantage that assaults upon continuing white economic and institutional power, invariably led by an emergent post-colonial black bourgeoisie, can be versed either in benign racial terms of 'black empowerment' as in contemporary South Africa, or in crudely xenophobic terms, as in contemporary Zimbabwe. Whilst there can be no questioning of the historical legitimacy and necessity for 'levelling the playing fields', the advantage of 'racial liberation' rhetoric is that it usually serves to obscure growing class divisions and inequalities amongst the formerly racially dominated. This is hugely facilitated by nationalist control over the state machinery.

The capture of state power Armed struggles waged by southern African liberation movements were directed at the wresting of state power from colonial and/or settler control, which was buttressed by both military and economic might, and indeed by international support from the major capitalist powers. Throughout the region, the liberation struggles were unequal, for although fought by and on behalf of the many against the few, they were also battles conducted by the weak against the strong. Of course, the odds were to be evened up to some extent by strategic and military support offered by the

former Soviet Union (and other Eastern bloc countries including, notably, Cuba) to allied liberation movements (MPLA, Frelimo, ANC, SWAPO and ZAPU), yet both the political and military requirements of the confrontation enforced the realisation of a culture of hierarchy, covert operation and discipline. Given the adoption of a socialist world view by the different liberation movements, and their resultant endorsement of national liberation struggle as *simultaneous with yet preceding* class struggle (in the sense that national struggles for democracy, fought by an alliance of differentially oppressed national classes, were seen as steps on the way to a succeeding struggle for the realisation of socialism), Leninist notions of vanguard leadership and democratic centralism predominated. In short, the formal equality of comradeship gave way not only to a functionally necessary hierarchy of leadership, but to endorsement of the latter as anointed by the unravelling of history and of the class struggle. What is important for the post-liberation phase therefore is not so much the extent to which such tendencies compressed, ignored and often denied 'struggles within the struggle', but that they promoted a culture in which opposition to established leadership and received theory was regarded as both illegitimate and reactionary. Ironically, therefore, there was a tendency for democracy (and its questioning of received truths) to be transmuted into anti-democracy.

These tendencies are demonstrated most dramatically through the construction of dominant party states. 'National liberation' struggle was directed at 'nationalist' capture of states which had previously been monopolised by 'aliens', whether colonial administrations or settlers. Colonial administrations were the more easily expelled, for on the whole – by the time that nationalist struggles had matured – they were ready to quit. Settler states were more complex, precisely because the settlers saw themselves as having no 'home' to go to, for indeed, they regarded where they were, in Africa, as their 'home'. In effect, they disputed the monopoly of the liberation movements to represent 'the nation', claiming that

they too were Namibians, Zimbabweans and South Africans. The concept of 'nation', they claimed, had to become wide and inclusive.

Triumphant national liberation movements did not attempt to dispute this claim, and all – initially, at least – embraced the idea of 'reconciliation', of opposed racial groups coming together to form coherent, cross-racial communities. This vision has come to be most widely celebrated in Bishop Desmond Tutu's vision of South Africa as 'the rainbow nation', as composed of many colours. Yet the idea of reconciliation was based on conditions. The first was that to become part of the new nations, white settlers had to surrender racial privilege. The second was that whilst they could continue to participate in politics, they would have to do so on terms dictated by the liberation movements. The third was they would have to concede and share economic power.

Their moving into office after winning pre-independence/liberation elections was not the same as the liberation movements having captured state power, for the machinery of state (or at least, at its apex and intermediate levels) was still largely peopled by whites. The early years of liberation have therefore been characterised by what, in contemporary South Africa, has become colloquially referred to as 'transformation'. Yet in practice, central to 'transformation', has been the triumph not so much of the nation as of the party over the state.

Today, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa are all 'dominant party states'. In its most elemental form, a dominant party is a party which, by reason of its popular support and/or its control of state machinery, is able to reproduce itself in power by virtue of its winning successive elections. Yet, commonly associated with party dominance are other phenomena, notably the fusion of party and state, and the denunciation of minorities who mobilise on issues vital to them and the delegitimisation of opposition. The growth amongst power-holders of a 'culture of entitlement' to state resources, and even to resources not owned by the state, is an inevitable result.

The demographic composition of ex-settler states is almost guaranteed to produce, and indeed, reproduce early victories for liberation movements after they have transformed themselves into political parties. For instance, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in Namibia has now won three successive parliamentary elections, conducted under a proportional representation electoral system (PR), by progressively larger margins: 57.3 per cent of the vote in the pre-independence elections of 1989, 72.7 per cent in 1994, and 76 per cent in 1999. Similarly, the African national Congress (ANC) – also competing under PR – won 62 per cent in the 1994 'liberation' election and 66 per cent in the second general election held in 1999. Even though some commentators propose that the 'fairness' of these elections has been compromised by, for instance, a predisposition of supposedly 'Independent' Electoral Commissions to favour the new ruling parties, and point out that these victories have been obtained in conditions of declining voter turnout, no serious observer has yet suggested that the overall popular legitimacy of either SWAPO or the ANC has been compromised. The fundamental basis of the 'dominance' of both SWAPO and the ANC remains the overwhelming majority support of the electorate. Not so, however, in Zimbabwe, where – notoriously – ZANU-PF dominance is now maintained only by widespread electoral fraud.

Elections in Zimbabwe are carried out under the first-past-the-post, Westminster style, electoral system which, conveniently for ZANU-PF, tends to provide more seats for parties who win elections than they would be entitled to under PR (although whites competed for a disproportionate number of 20 reserved seats in the first two democratic elections of 1980 and 1985). ZANU-PF secured 63 per cent of the vote and 57 seats out of 80 in the 'common roll' 'liberation' elections of 1980, and 77 per cent of the vote and 64 seats in 1985. Subsequently, having merged (or absorbed) ZAPU-PF (which had won 24 per cent and 19 per cent of the popular African vote in 1980 and 1985 respectively) in 1989, ZANU-PF won 116 out of

120 elective parliamentary seats in 1990 and 78 per cent of the votes and 118 elective seats in 1995. However, these latter two victories were held in conditions of severely reduced voter registration (only around 32 per cent of eligible voters participated in the election in 1995), and were conducted under conditions increasingly designed to reproduce ZANU-PF hegemony. As noted by Jonathan Moyo (1992: 145-46) with regard to the 1990 elections (before he jumped aboard Mugabe's bandwagon to become his Minister of Information before the 2000 election), not only had ZAPU-PF been cajoled and bullied into joining ZANU-PF, but the delimitation of constituencies and administration of the election systematically favoured the ruling party. Furthermore, just in case things might have gone awry, constitutional reforms brought about before the election resulted in the creation of 30 non-elective nominated seats in parliament, appointment to which was in essence made by Mugabe. When, therefore, serious opposition to ZANU-PF was to burgeon prior to the parliamentary elections of 2000 in the form of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the scene was already set for an unequal battle. And that battle was made even more unequal by the deployment by ZANU, unchecked by the state, of systematic violence against its competitors, compounded by political subjugation of the judiciary, intimidation of the independent media, and not least, rigging of the elections. The reign of terror which has now gripped much of Zimbabwe, following the shameless rigging of the 2002 presidential election, now extends to what human rights workers are describing (at least in the rural areas) as a 'systematic political cleansing of the population'. This includes large numbers of young girls being taken off to camps run by ZANU's youth militia, and subjected to rape and forced concubinage (Lamb, 2002; Sachikonye, 2002).

ZANU-PF's clinging to power represents an extreme case of a party which, having lost its popular hegemony, has had to resort to securing its electoral dominance through authoritarian and blatantly undemocratic means. At one level, this is

manifestly because Mugabe and his cronies refuse to give up the material fruits of power (even if, ironically, their actions are shattering the capacity of the economy to produce the wealth on which they seek to thrive). Yet at another level, it is almost certainly the case that they simultaneously retain an ideological belief in ZANU-PF's historical mission to liberate Zimbabwe from its legacy of colonial oppression. Indeed, Mugabe and ZANU-PF have increasingly come to identify their own continuity in power as embodying the security and integrity of the state. Because ZANU-PF purports to embody the nation, anyone or anything opposed to it is equally seen as opposing the nation, and becomes the enemy.

This syllogism is relatively easily maintained in the face of opposition to the regime from the white farming community, or the white community in general. They can be easily dismissed as aliens, as settlers, as 'Rhodesians' who have rejected the hand of friendship offered to them by black Zimbabweans, who have continued to cling to white power and privilege, and who look to Britain as the ex-colonial power to maintain imperial domination of the economy. Yet less easily dismissed are those black Zimbabweans who populate or support the MDC. Of necessity, their claim to majority support has to be utterly rejected by reference to 'popular victories' for ZANU-PF in both parliamentary and presidential elections. Yet rather more important even than that is the need to denounce them as disloyal, as in league with the white farmers and as a front for the British – in a word, as un-Zimbabwean, as traitors to the nation. In a chilling echo of the Khmer Rouge, Didymus Mutasa, ZANU-PF's organisational secretary, recently declared, in regard to a country with 12 million people: 'We would be better off with only six million people, with our own people who support the liberation struggle' (Lamb, 2002). The struggle against the domestic opposition, (or rather 'enemy') has now become 'The Third Chimurenga'.

There are rather too many similarities in Namibia for comfort. Although Lodge (2001: 191) has noted the 'awkward

fit between the patriotic legitimacy and moral status assumed by former liberation movements and the more restrained entitlement usually claimed by political parties in liberal electioneering', he argues that Namibia's electoral politics appear to conform to a regional trajectory. In this trajectory victory by a dominant liberation movement in a founding election, characterised by high levels of voter participation, is followed by subsequent electoral contests which result in an enlarged majority for the ruling party, alongside an increasingly fragmented opposition and declining levels of voter participation. On the whole, discontented ruling party supporters do not change sides, but simply stay away from the polls. This kind of electoral trajectory, suggests Lodge (2001: 226), is unlikely to change until there are major alterations in social structure and the composition of the economy (as would appear to have happened in Zimbabwe).

Even if SWAPO's legitimacy is not yet being questioned by the sort of crisis which is confronting ZANU-PF, there are worrying indications of an inherent authoritarianism. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the party's reluctance to engage with its own history, to 'break down the wall of silence' with regard to its past treatment (including torture) of various internal dissidents during the liberation struggle. Their demand to be heard, for their maltreatment to be acknowledged, has to be waged in an atmosphere of continuing fear, even though they do not constitute any sort of political threat. Yet even more worrying has been the centralisation of power within the Presidency, with Sam Nujoma not only having manipulated a change in the independence constitution which enabled him to stand for a third stint in office in 1999, but also giving indications that he is fishing to stand for yet another, fourth term. (Most noticeably, he has dismissed Hage Geingob, his seasoned, highly regarded prime minister of twelve years and thereby a potential successor). Meanwhile, his admiration for Mugabe seems to know no bounds: he has echoed the latter's rejection of the 'good governance' provisions of NEPAD as colonially inspired, he has threatened to arrest and deport

homosexuals, and very recently, he has not only openly backed Mugabe's land-grab policy but has himself turned up the pressure upon Namibia's own white farming community, threatening them with expropriation. To be sure, much of his rhetoric can be dismissed as bombast, yet he seems bent on creating the impression that SWAPO without him has no future and that only he can maintain national unity. (Flanagan, 2002; Maletsky, 2002).

Nor is there a sufficiently coherent, organised and united opposition to cause the ANC much serious discomfort in South Africa. There is no single party or combination of opposition parties which, at the present time, constitutes an electoral threat, for they are divided along grounds of race, culture and ideology, and many analysts suggest that a sea change in South African politics will only occur if and when there is break in the alliance between the ANC, the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the formation by the latter elements of a new party of the left. Hence it is that the ANC has been able to embark upon a strategy of the centralisation of power which, increasingly, is muddying the distinction between party and state. Key elements of this strategy are: the strengthening of the institution and machinery of the presidency relative to other senior branches of the civil service; the 'deployment' of ANC appointees to most senior positions and high offices of state, and the regular 'redeployment' of ANC personnel between parliamentary and other public positions (this is facilitated by the party list system which allows for the replacement of individual legislators without the inconvenience of by-elections); the erosion of parliamentary independence relative to government (notably via the subordination of the parliamentary committee system to party discipline); the assertion of central control over the provinces, notably by the ANC central hierarchy's selection of its party's provincial premiers; the effort to undermine parliamentary opposition via the passage of floor-crossing legislation; and, not least, the imposition of party discipline to

muzzle internal party debate and criticisms. Critics also allege the ANC's determination to erode the independence of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, and to render it as obsequious to government as it was under the formerly ruling National Party.

The debate about the consequences of the ANC's status as a dominant party remains extremely divided, with on the one hand, doomsayers predicting that the country has embarked upon the path of post-colonial, African decline, the more optimistic continuing to propose that limits set by the constitution, the weight of business and civil society, and an alternative historical tradition of participatory democracy amongst the constituent elements which compose the contemporary party will allow space for democratic institutions and traditions of accountability to become entrenched. Or to put it another way: the optimistic scenario is based upon assumptions that it is the very complexity of the South African situation, and the fact that the democratic settlement was based upon the agreement to coexist and cooperate of countervailing forces which could not defeat each other, that will work to constrain the more authoritarian values and practices of the ANC in power.

Most commentators agree that a key aspect of any such successful consolidation of democracy will be action taken in advance to avoid a reproduction of Zimbabwe's deliberately racialised scenario.

The elision of race and class Lloyd Sachikonye (2002) divides Zimbabwe's post-colonial history into three phases. First, during the decade which followed independence in 1980, ZANU-PF consolidated its power through both 'iron-fist' measures (the suppression of dissidence in Matebeleland between 1982 and 1987) and the subsequent alliance with ZAPU-PF. Second, between 1990 and 1998, civil society organisations expanded in quantitative and qualitative terms on the back of the increase of working, middle and professional classes promoted by economic growth in the

1980s. However, although economic hardships increased, opposition parties remained largely moribund, even as the regime became increasingly authoritarian. Hence it was left to civil society groupings (trade unions, human rights and civil society organisations) to launch series of general strikes and political campaigns around both economic and political grievances in 1997 and 1998 and to mobilise against a draft constitution (proposed by the regime) which left authoritarian powers of the presidency unchecked. The third period, after 1998, has been one in which tendencies towards even more increased authoritarianism (buttressed by the ‘war veterans’) and a creeping militarisation of politics have been resisted by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a major opposition party formed in 1999 and woven out of a broad coalition of social forces such as youth, students, trade unions, the middle classes and business. It is broad movement, dedicated to dislodging ZANU-PF from power, which only narrowly lost the 2000 parliamentary elections and was only ‘defeated’ in the 2002 presidential election because the regime was able to use its control of the administrative and coercive apparatuses of the state to secure victory for Mugabe.

It has been during the third phase that land has moved to the centre-stage of Zimbabwean politics. Prior to the land invasions of early 2000, the rural population was composed of 4400 large-scale farmers on 11.2 million hectares; 1 million families (6.5 million people) on 16 million hectares in the ‘communal areas’; 10 000 small-scale commercial families on 1.2 million hectares; 70 000 black resettlement families on 3.5 million hectares; and a state farming sector of about 0.5 million hectares. Although land reform measures undertaken in the early 1980s were impressive, the government’s attention to the land question thereafter fell away until in 1997 it announced that 1471 commercial farms would be acquired and resettled. But why then did the government thereafter scale down its demand to 350 farms by the end of 1998, and why by the end of 1999 had the government not taken or bought any?

As David Moore (2001) points out, the imperative for speedy 'settlement' of the land question in 2000 did not come from an aroused peasantry, but from the politics of a regime facing economic crisis, its loss of allies within civil society and its being forced into a corner by the 'war-veterans'. The War Veterans Association (WVA) was an interest group which had arisen in the early 1990s based upon dissatisfactions with a poorly implemented demobilisation programme carried out after independence, and which in 1995 had persuaded the state to issue larger pensions to war veterans than the 1980 settlement had allowed for. However, because disbursement of these allowances rapidly became entangled in all sorts of improprieties, the WVA in 1997 demanded payment (with the apparent support of the army). The result was a massive Z\$4.5 billion pay-out, which could only be financed by the rapid devaluation of the currency and the imposition of extra taxes which brought the regime (and the WVA) into immediate confrontation with capital, and with the urban working and middle classes. It was in this context, and also that of the added financial drain caused by the regime's military involvement in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo on the side of President Kabila, that civil society took political form in the shape of the foundation of the MDC. And it was after ZANU-PF's defeat in the February 2002 referendum on the proposed new constitution that the regime 'decided that the reserve army of the unemployed should become an army of land invaders' (Moore, 2001: 263). Hence it is that the majority of the veterans are drawn from unemployed youths in the cities; and indeed, Moore argues that the leading force behind the invasions is the army. The seizures of white land constitute a campaign of 'primitive accumulation' by the military and political members of ZANU-PF's ruling coterie, and that rather than Africanising or socialising capitalist agrarian production, the land seizures seem to be installing a land-ownership system which, if anything, is going backwards historically by reproducing feudalism (or some other set of pre-capitalist relations) in which the war-veteran, land invaders are

being drawn into vassal-like subordination to those who are being awarded the farms.

It is in this crisis-ridden, highly complex context that the rhetoric and actions of the regime have become racialised. The strategy of primitive accumulation, of keeping Mugabe's principal military and political cronies (and the war veterans) on side in conditions of mounting economic and political crisis, demanded the immediate delegitimation of the white farming community as racist, of having rejected the politics of reconciliation extended to them after independence, as exploitative, and not least, of being in cahoots with a British government which retains imperialist designs. Hence it is, likewise, that the MDC is accused of aiding and abetting imperialism, of having sold out the liberation struggle and of having aligned itself with 'the whites' and the agendas of international capitalism. They have denied their birthright, and by implication, therefore thoroughly deserve any rough-house treatment that they get.

In any former settler colony, continuing racial inequities in ownership skewed in favour of a white minority are perpetually available as a cause for political mobilisation, on grounds of justice, equality or just plain jealousy. And unequal land ownership is peculiarly visible, as well as having a particular connection with white conquest and colonial exploitation, a connection which speaks readily to African nationalist sentiment. Hence the inherent instability of the land settlements at independence (or 'liberation'), even if they are buttressed by 'reconciliation' rhetoric and 'free seller-free buyer' arrangements based upon legal recognition of land titles. As the Zimbabwe case illustrates, relative stability can be rapidly transformed by crises which have rather little to do with the land question as such. Hence the new feeling of vulnerability of the white farming community in Namibia, where some 30.5 million hectares are farmed by whites and only 2.2 million hectares by blacks. 'The whites are being driven out' one of the few white farmers to have sold out recently is reported to have said. 'In 20 or 30 years' time I don't imagine there being

any whites left in Southern Africa' (Flanagan, 2002). Whether exaggerated or not, such prophecies are likely to be self-fulfilling: the age profile of the white farming community is likely to increase as younger whites move out, and property prices are likely to move into relative decline. Not surprisingly, the Zimbabwe land-grab has given rise to urgent claims that land reform in South Africa, where the government's present plan is to transfer a third of all agricultural land held by white commercial farmers to black farmers by 2015 (Nxumalo, 2002), is moving too slowly. Unless swifter progress is made, it is often said, South Africa will render itself liable to Zimbabwe-style land-grabs.

Even if the analogue is inaccurate, if only because it misses the point that it is the army rather than 'the landless' which has provided the motor power behind the land invasions in Zimbabwe, the fact remains that liberation movements are bound by their credo to an agenda of redistribution, of righting historical wrongs. Yet they are simultaneously constrained by the nature of the post-colonial settlement, whereby black assumption of state power remains confronted by white control over the economy. In South Africa, of course, this dilemma is particularly acute, precisely because the continent's most advanced industrial economy is dominated by powerful international companies, as well as South African corporations and finance houses. Some of these have already indicated their willingness to relocate operations overseas, supposedly to render themselves more internationally competitive, yet doubtless this is also to minimise the political risk of co-habiting with a former liberation movement, even one like the ANC which for the moment has embraced free market capitalism.

In this situation, the post-settlement ANC has had little choice but to make a virtue of gradualist 'black empowerment'. A stilted, Marxist rhetoric may still be de rigueur in party debate and publications, yet the class struggle it is waging is more likely to be that of 'the patriotic bourgeoisie' than that of a black working class which is increasingly alienated by

government policies which are depicted as pro-capital and failing miserably to stem the tide of unemployment. Even if, in the long course of history, white economic domination is likely to be challenged far more by demographic shifts such as markedly increased black access to secondary and tertiary education, industrial and financial skills, public employment and expanded wealth-making opportunities than by legislative requirements demanding 'employment equity', the public focus of black empowerment is likely to remain that of black entry into the higher reaches of industry, and black ownership of companies. In the rhetoric of yesteryear, the national democratic revolution provides the foundation for socialism. Ergo, promoting black embourgeoisement becomes not only the ANC's patriotic duty, but also its fulfillment of its historical agenda. Conveniently, however, the post-Soviet world has changed, and socialism to all intents and purposes is dead. The ANC may now (at times) claim to have embraced social democracy, yet if it has, then it is a Blairite version which prioritises wealth-creation over welfare, and opportunity over equity. 'Black empowerment' is thus readily transformed into a black middle-class-enhancing construct which celebrates the non-racialisation of, rather than the abolition of, poverty and inequity. (The distribution of income in South Africa remains one of the highest in the world. Even though the proportion of the highest income group which is black has increased markedly over the last three decades, the proportion of households in the poorest four income groups that are African has also increased) (SAIRR, 2001: 374-76).

As Gerry Mare (2001: 99-100) observes, the simplification of South Africa's complexity into racialised compartments (as suggested by President Mbeki's famous 'two nations' speech) that ignore class and other differences (such as gender) is ultimately anti-democratic, for it ignores the voice of the poor:

...the context of the continued racialization of South African society cannot but be the continuation provided by the explicit or implicit utilization of the notion of 'colonialism of a special type',

with its clear, and hence, unproblematic, divide into white settlers and black indigenous population. The race epithet in the two nations classification is, therefore, descriptively, quite correct, but analytically static and inadequate to the demands of understanding the *dynamics* of a South African society that has to place itself within rampant international capitalism, and growing internal divisions between rich and poor, also black rich and poor. Within this perspective, the continued enrichment of the black middle class and bourgeoisie does not serve as a contradiction to the two nations theory, as black people, of whatever class position, have already been homogeneously defined as 'the poor'.

It is in this context that Kenneth Good (2002) subtitles his recent exploration of liberalism in Africa as *Elites against Democracy*.

Democracy *against* liberation?

Conventional wisdom hails the 1990s as the decade of Africa's 'second independence'. The corpse of state socialism was found buried under the ruins of the Berlin wall, and popular forces for change in Africa were provided space to flourish. Dictators who had previously been propped up by the Western powers had the rug pulled from under their feet, and a wave of competitive elections occurred throughout the southern African region (as elsewhere throughout the continent): Namibia, 1989; Zambia, 1991; Angola, 1992; Lesotho, 1993; Mozambique, 1994; and South Africa, 1994, all joined Botswana as 'multi-party democracies'. These transformations were correctly celebrated, for popular enthusiasms indicated that ordinary people were *Voting for Democracy* (Daniel, Southall & Szeftel, 1999). Considerable gains were made: new constitutions, new commitments to human rights, and new acknowledgements of the liberal democratic values of diversity, individual liberties, checks and balances, and the necessity of the accountability of rulers to their voters. Of course, progress was uneven, with Angola, for instance, being

plunged back into civil war by Jonas Savimbi's incapacity to accept coming second in an election. Yet even allowing for such setbacks (as well as other alarums such as were sounded by electoral losers who provoked constitutional crises in Lesotho in 1994 and 1998), multiparty democracy has begun to entrench itself as a *system*, based upon, not least, the increased presence and muscle of 'civil society' in the form of trade unions, numerous non-governmental organisations, expansion of the cohort of professionals and of the middle classes in general, and so on.

Despite these very real advances, democracy has as yet played only a limited role in bringing about the liberation of the mass of ordinary people of the region from the scourges of poverty, low health and educational status, widespread unemployment and indeed, fear of the state. Electoral democracy was viewed as a harbinger of, in the words of the ANC slogan, 'a better life for all', yet its gains appear to be popularly regarded as real but disappointing (as indicated, for instance, in declining voter participation in successive elections). Why is this?

Part of the problem is structural. A regional pattern is emerging which views the future consolidation of democracy through an emphasis on the *procedural* and *regulatory* aspects of the conduct of elections. That is fine and good in so far as it goes, but in that it has given rise to dominance of the electoral arena in most countries by a single party, the basic premise of liberal democracy – alternating governments – is effectively undermined. Opposition parties as a result tend to be under-capacitated and under-funded, even if they are not actively harassed and intimidated by the ruling party (as in Zimbabwe). Similarly, there is a major issue concerning accountability. For instance, a recent survey, conducted for the Electoral Task Team (ETT) which is charged with considering changes to the way South Africans choose their representatives, found that only 60 per cent of respondents felt that the existing electoral system provides for individual parliamentarians to be held accountable, 25 per cent said bluntly that it

did not, and only one in five believed that Members of Parliament try their best to look after ordinary people's interests or listen to what they have to say (Southall & Mattes, 2002). And if parliamentarians are not adequately accountable, nor are the other instruments of state. For instance, in a recent report, Amnesty International has recorded how a combination of high crime levels and use of police for political purposes has led to systematic human rights violations in SADC countries, including arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention, torture, summary execution, excessive use of force in arrests and public order policing. In most such countries, 'the prospects are minimal for independent and impartial investigations of complaints' (Amnesty International, 2002: 65).

At one level, democracy, which should be about the betterment of people's lives, can address such structural problems by engineering better structures and rendering them effective. Electoral systems can be refashioned to promote greater accountability (for instance, responses to the ETT survey suggest that voters would approve of the introduction of multi-member constituencies within a framework that would maintain overall proportionality); public funding can be extended to ensure that opposition parties are adequately resourced; governments can sign up to and implement international human rights conventions; institutions (such as ombudsmen and specialist commissions) can be established, or capacitated, to provide proper checks upon the authorities; and so on. Indeed, there are numerous worthy projects around the region, often funded by well-intentioned 'donors' and implemented by governments themselves or NGOs, which are directed at bringing about such improvements. No one should discount their importance, or the beneficial impact they can make. And yet, and yet, what they will add up to? The answer that Ken Good would give is 'not very much', for in his view it is the liberal model of democracy itself that is wrong, and unable to meet the needs of southern Africa's people.

Good (2002) argues that when the liberal democratic model is chosen, where everything revolves around the act of voting in periodic elections, 'elitism and inequalities readily flourish'. Voting for governments and politicians is absolutely *necessary*, yet it is also manifestly *insufficient* as a means of empowering citizens to control elites, who are principally concerned with self-aggrandizement. In practice, the essential function served by elections under liberal democracy is to get elites elected, and the brief acts of voting and counting are open to wide abuse, whether in the industrialised West or in Africa. Furthermore, liberal democracy allows capitalism to flourish. Capitalism creates inequalities and injustices which liberalism, favouring a non-interventionist state and a non-participatory citizenship, is unwilling or unable to resolve. No wonder, he argues, that ordinary people are becoming increasingly disillusioned with electoral democracy, which does little or nothing to improve their material comforts, yet leaves autocratic elites untouched!

Good takes a particularly gloomy view of the dominant party systems as they operate in southern Africa. Parliamentary checks upon executives, as written into constitutions, have effectively been nullified by the predominance of ruling parties which operate in a hierarchical and disciplined fashion. PR systems as implemented via closed party-list systems in Namibia and South Africa extinguish the accountability of representatives to their electors between elections. The centralisation of power, including concentration of power of preferment, in the hands of the presidency, encourages autocracy (exhibited by various presidents' sense of their own indispensability). The weaknesses of opposition parties and their incapacity to provide viable alternative governments represents 'a near contradiction even in liberal terms' (Good, 2002: 15). The lack of effective accountability allows state profligacy and elite corruption and enrichment to proceed virtually unchecked (unless revealed and contained by intra-elite convulsions, jealousies and rivalries); demands for accountability from outside the elite is deflected, and those raising questions abused or ignored. The

media is regularly brought under control or intimidated; and independent institutions designed to impose restraints upon government are undermined.

This elitist model is based more upon American example than social democratic practice as exemplified in the Scandinavian countries, where deliberate political attempts have been made to ameliorate the effects of inequalities produced by capitalism. The deregulation of industry and globalisation have been exported to Africa in the form of structural adjustment and neo-liberalism. However, whilst the US model of unbridled capitalism can be productive of enormous wealth, it is also productive of extremes of riches and poverty. 'Where deregulation, flexibility and downsizing are uncritically embraced, the quest for equality and justice is abandoned' (Good, 2002: 71). In the US the rich are getting richer, and the poor, poorer. Within the apparent prosperity, the incomes of eight out of ten persons have stagnated or fallen over the last two decades, whilst those of the advantaged have increased markedly. By the end of the 1990s, the richest one per cent of American households received after-tax income which was the same as that received by the 100 million people with the lowest incomes combined. This group of 2.7 million people owned 39 per cent of national wealth, and half of all stock market shares. The share of income received by the top quintile had reached 49 per cent by 1998 (Good, 2002: 71–76).

This 'ruthless economy' is married to liberal democracy, which is a form of polity which was devised during the first great wave of democratisation in the Nineteenth Century when capitalism was being threatened by the rise of socialism and social democracy. Liberal democracy arose, in response, as a means of incorporating the masses into politics in an orderly way, not through 'irrational', participatory interventions such as strike action, but in voting for competing elites at periodic elections. 'The old democratic ideals of justice and equality were shorn-off as dangerously ideological, while Lockean beliefs in the rights of individual property ownership remained' (Good,

2002: 76). Elitism accompanied by popular passivity came to characterise the main tendencies within the liberal form of democracy.

Central to Good's interpretation is the argument that, fundamentally, the liberal democracies of southern Africa are all of a kind. To be sure, the Zimbabwean regime stands out in the enormity of its state lawlessness, economic destructiveness and contempt for the people in sustained and awful combination, yet all harbour kleptocracy, autocracy and elitism. Botswana is exceptional in its generally good governance and South Africa can rightly boast one of the most advanced liberal constitutions in the world. Likewise, Presidents Festus Mogae and Thabo Mbeki both present far more amiable faces to the world than the wretched Mugabe. Yet all three regimes operate through dominant parties, centralising presidencies, and the negation of opposition. Singularly and collectively, the ruling elites of southern Africa have demonstrated that they are less interested in democracy than they are in pursuing their self-interest and retention of power. Protests about human rights violations and abuse of constitutions in neighbouring states are overlooked and suppressed, buried in African leaders' concern 'not to intervene in the domestic affairs of other countries'.

The defining instance of such leaders' contempt for popular opinion has been the way in which they have ganged up to protect Mugabe. For instance, despite clear evidence by domestic and international observers, and to its immense credit, the SADC Parliamentary Forum, that the 2002 Presidential election was, in effect, rigged, most African official observers groups and African governments lined up to proclaim the election 'free and fair'. The head of the South African observer team labelled the election 'flawed but legitimate', the ANC congratulated 'the people of Zimbabwe' for a successful election, and the government in Pretoria, led by a party that only a few years ago was calling for international solidarity with the struggle for democracy in South Africa, proved unable to make a stand for democracy, despite the fact that it was the prime

mover behind the NEPAD project for African Peer Review of governance and democracy. As Ray Bush and Morris Szeftel (2002: 11–12) have recently opined:

The collusion of African regimes in their support for Mugabe's abuse of power is an indictment of African governments' failure to relinquish power despite having little popular support. Instead they cling to office until state coffers are drained in the support of governing class strategies for capital accumulation... it is not the winning of office that counts – it's the losing and ability, and integrity of political elites and their followers, to accept the will of the majority.

The lesson of Zimbabwe, they say, is the need to get beyond the misuse of sovereignty (state power) as a way of furthering private wealth accumulation and to get past 'the idea of democracy as the adoption of some formulaic liberal prescriptions'. Africa's struggles for genuine development rest upon governments enjoying a genuinely democratic mandate that will give them the means to negotiate more effectively with a global capitalism that is presently condemning the continent to continuing subjugation and servitude.

Yet is such a liberating version of democracy possible?

Towards more meaningful democracy

It is not necessary to agree with all that Ken Good says to recognise the challenge that his work presents. For instance, some would argue that he underplays the extent to which democracy and constitutionalism can take root even under conditions of the lengthy dominance of a political system by a dominant party (the Congress Party in India went down to defeat after nearly forty years in office in 1975). Others would argue that there are differences of *kind* between (at least) Botswana and Zimbabwe; yet others would urge that his approach is incorrigibly 'Afro-pessimist' and that, flawed though it may be, the human rights and governance situation

in southern Africa (and Africa more widely) today is far improved on the situation as it was just over a decade ago; and many would propose, alongside Bill Clinton, that 'it's the economy, stupid!', and that given a chance, economic growth, centred upon a dynamic South African industrial heartland, will, despite all Good's protestations, lead to the slow but steady betterment of the conditions of life of the region's people. All such arguments could, probably, make some reasonable mileage. Yet the thrust of his thesis remains: democracy in Southern Africa is centred around electoralism, is otherwise fairly hollow, and does not, on the whole, make a lot of difference to ordinary people's lives. Indeed, its association with a capitalism that is largely unregulated is actually promoting greater, not lesser, inequalities.

So what is to be done? Good's answer is that the region should move towards more participatory democracy. The original model of (a popular and participatory) democracy was provided in ancient Athens, where, originating in an insurrectionary movement by the lower classes, democracy represented political power wielded actively and collectively by the 'demos', that is, all those who were defined as citizens. Citizenship excluded women and slaves. However, just as the exclusion of blacks from civil rights until the 1960s does not disqualify the United States of that era from being considered a democracy, nor should the limited definition of citizenship which applied in Athens detract from 'the reality and significance of its participatory democracy' (Good, 2002: 168). Elites of wealth and education existed but did not dominate political society; rules had to be observed by all; direct popular power was exercised by ordinary citizens in the Assembly; agendas for meetings were drawn up by a Council whose members were elected by lot and forbidden to serve for more than two annual terms; any citizen could speak; decisions were made by simple majority; and attendance and occupancy of important official positions was remunerated so that no citizen would be excluded on financial grounds. These, and other similar

provisions, resulted in a conception of citizenship which was 'profound'. Ordinary men saw themselves not just as isolated individuals but as citizens with ties and responsibilities to the wider community; democratic ideology encouraged the distribution of wealth and the exercise of political power only by the wealthy; and poorer citizens were enabled to prevent their exploitation by the rich.

Good sees this model as having been rediscovered in the popular struggle against apartheid, as embodied most notably in the United Democratic Front (UDF) and COSATU. From the Durban strikes of 1973 on, black workers began the transformation of the internal resistance movement which moved away from the exiled ANC's concentration on external assault upon the apartheid state. They forged a democratic movement within the country, which was harnessed to independent working class action. This gave rise to a style of politics which emphasised grassroots participatory democracy, or 'people's power' as evidenced by the appearance of street committees and people's courts that were organisations concerned with dispute resolution and self-government. Such locally-based initiatives were seen as foundations for democracy, for the UDF argued that conventional parliamentary democracy would work to exclude the bulk of ordinary people. The basic principles of democracy were seen as:

- periodically elected and recallable leadership;
- collective leadership;
- mandates and accountability;
- reporting and reporting back; and
- criticism and self-criticism.

Meanwhile, the development of a trade union movement which steered clear of the futile quest for the revolutionary overthrow of the apartheid state led to engagement with both capital and the state, and the exertion of countervailing power, whilst simultaneously exemplifying a grassroots industrial democracy which emphasised the direct election of shop-stewards and the accountability of leaders.

Good argues that, faced by an internal culture of democracy that threatened its elitist practices (long honed in exile), the post-1990 ANC was quick to shut the UDF down. In contrast, COSATU's strength meant that a labour-repressive policy was not possible, and indeed the 'new South Africa' saw the creation of a relatively labour-friendly industrial regime. However, workers' organised muscle has been steadily eroded by the ANC's pro-capitalist policies, industrial restructuring and increasing unemployment. The potential of the highly promising experiment in participatory democracy has therefore not been realised. Nonetheless, nowhere else on the continent does the capacity, vested in an industrial working class, to challenge autocratic elites exist. However, on how popular power in South Africa can be revived and sustained, Good is disappointingly vague. He refers to that challenge as 'an unending struggle'.

The principal problem for Good, as for other theorists of the same ilk, is that although participatory democracy constitutes a major advance on liberal democracy, it leaves 'several fundamental questions unresolved, including how the conditions of its existence are to be adequately secured' (Held, 1987: 280). As David Held elaborates, whilst it appears true that people learn to participate by participating, it would be unwise to assume that increased participation by itself will produce people who are more democratic, cooperative and dedicated to the common good. It is wiser to assume that people will not perform morally or intellectually better than they do at the moment. Perhaps more fundamentally, it is questionable whether participation necessarily leads to consistent and desirable political outcomes. Tensions and conflicts can arise between individual liberty, distributional questions (social justice) and democratic decisions (majority rule).

What then, given the difficult heritage of autocracy (which has deep roots in both the colonial order and the liberation movements) on the one hand, and the inadequacies of the

liberal model on the other, is the way forward to more meaningful democracy in Southern Africa? It is all too obvious that there are no easy answers. However, democratic theory does provide various pointers. For instance, following Held, we can argue for a conception of democracy which:

- recognises the fundamental importance of a number of liberal tenets. These tenets notably concern the centrality of an 'impersonal' structure of public power, a constitution to help guarantee and protect rights, a diversity of power centres within and outside the state, and mechanisms to promote competition and debate about alternative political platforms;
- accepts that centralised state institutions are necessary devices for enacting legislation, enforcing rights, promulgating new policies and containing inevitable conflicts between particular interests. Representative electoral institutions, including parliament and a competitive party system, are an inescapable element for authorising and coordinating these activities;
- understands that because such liberal arrangements do not in themselves adequately specify the conditions for the possibility of political participation by all citizens, or how government institutions can actually regulate the forces (such as powerful corporations) which shape everyday life, the realisation of democracy will demand that societal conditions should facilitate political participation. However, although citizens should not be obliged to participate in politics they should be obliged to accept democratic decisions unless they can be proved that the latter have violated their rights;
- recognises that grossly unequal distribution of material resources should be altered in order to create conditions of political equality. It follows that political equality demands a tough conception of distributive justice. Distributive justice will demand, in particular, the recognition of the necessity of minimising inequality in the ownership and

control of the means of production. In other words, whilst the right to private ownership is a fundamental condition of democracy, it is equally the case that the realisation of democracy demands that there must be clear restrictions on private ownership;

- accepts that different sets of strategies and policies will need to be applied to different sets of people to achieve a broad equality of economic conditions. Alleviating the conditions of the least well off while restricting the scope and circumstances of the most powerful would apply to a variety of areas marked by systematic inequality (wealth, gender, race and ethnicity) where it can be shown that such inequality undermines or limits the pursuit of democratic decision-making. However, this agenda is in no way compatible with attacks on personal, social and cultural differences;
- understands that clear limits should be put on the extent of liberty which citizens can enjoy. The liberty of some individuals must not be allowed at the expense of the majority of citizens. So some people will no longer have scope to accumulate vast resources at the expense of others; and, overall,
- recognises that democracy must be based upon a political system that enjoys legitimacy. Yet a political system is unlikely to achieve lasting legitimacy if it is deeply implicated in the creation and reproduction of systematic inequalities of power, wealth and income. Only a political order that places the transformation of those inequalities at its centre will enjoy legitimacy in the long run.

Is this all pie in the sky given the global and domestic inequalities, and the weight of history, which so circumscribe democracy in southern Africa today? Pessimists would say that it is. Progressives would say that, at the very least, advances must be made in the right direction. This must mean confronting the difficult legacies left by both colonialism and the struggle to achieve liberation, and indeed, the limitations of

liberal democracy. In this regard, Good is absolutely correct in pointing out that precedents exist within the region, most particularly in southern Africa, which point to a form of democratic society which would go beyond the limitations of the liberal model. It is therefore incumbent upon progressive activists to debate the principles upon which a more advanced type of democracy should be based.

This is precisely the reason why the African Peer Review Mechanism proposed by NEPAD must become the property of Africa's people. Leaving it to the rulers will likely result in its becoming yet another instrument to camouflage their undemocratic forms of domination.

End note

1 For one careful dissection of how the electoral authorities in Zimbabwe manipulated the vote in 2002, see R.W. Johnson, 'Impossible to reconcile Zimbabwe poll turnout and electoral register', *Business Day*, 4 April 2002.

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