

WHAT FUTURE FOR ELECTORAL STUDIES?:

A critique

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ABSTRACT

Using approaches drawn from critical theory this paper explores the idea of electoral studies from historical and contemporary perspectives. It argues that the techniques used in electoral studies – in Southern African and elsewhere – have been corroded by neo-liberal economics and therefore by the rote and routine of management studies. Electoral studies might secure individual security and so promote governance by becoming more relevant to the lives and everyday struggles of the region's citizens.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to provoke. Provocation seems necessary because, for some, 'electoral studies' resembles 'diplomatic studies', even to the extent that the staged smiles of the latter seem more and more to hang around elections and their monitoring. Both diplomatic studies and electoral studies are applied social sciences and, like many of this genre, they are micro in the scope of their interest. They are, therefore, creatures of a particular conceptual genus; seemingly far removed from macro-theory, they hide, virus-like, within larger discourses and, when called upon to justify themselves, they do so in strictly utilitarian terms. As a result, their deliberations seem to be almost entirely devoid of any wider preoccupation, theoretical or other.

* This paper was presented at a conference, 'Challenges for Democratic Governance and Human Development in Africa', celebrating EISA's tenth anniversary, 8 – 10 November 2006.

Of course, 'electoral studies' is not new in the discipline of 'political science' – indeed, the original purpose of the systematic study of politics, especially in the United States, was to develop a 'new man' who could be called 'the democratic citizen'. And it was unlikely that the project of building and sustaining this democratic citizenry was possible without understanding how individual citizens operate within institutionalised politics – particularly at the high point of the process, the election itself. Because this argument partially relies on the philosophy of science, for a few further paragraphs the paper considers the practice of 'electoral studies' within its generic setting. The adjective generic is not a good one; particularistic is better. This is because electoral studies has been dominated by American scholarship and therefore it is possible to show that all studies of elections – including those in Southern Africa – have been deeply influenced by a particular form of scholarship on, and understanding of, elections, both within democracies and elsewhere. Inevitably, then, 'electoral studies' as it is understood in Southern Africa, and especially within EISA, is tied to an American conceptual template, which has major implication for an understanding of social relations through the aperture offered by electoral studies.

Most applied social science is linked not to the study of political science but to that of its near cousin, sociology. And it was in this form that the narrative of electoral studies follows from the work done in two centres of American sociological scholarship, Columbia University and the University of Chicago. This story begins with the mid-1940s work of Paul Lazarfeld (then of the Bureau for Applied Social Research at Columbia), which was the first study to focus on an election – namely, the 1940s presidential campaign – and fieldwork on it, which was done in Elmira, New York. Its success shaped the intellectual paradigm for the study of electoral behaviour and helped to transform understanding of both citizenship and democracy.

This study, which was located in a tradition we now call 'political sociology', was not the only area of work that was influencing democratic theory: two further strains of enquiry were also involved. One was associated with a more distant cousin of politics, psychology – today, this branch is called 'political psychology'. The other looked backwards, drawing electoral studies towards the roots of political enquiry, which was in the field of political economy. To do this, this strain of electoral studies drew the study of elections (and citizen behaviour) towards the powerful explanatory force of self-interest that dominates much economic thinking.¹

Although the United States pioneered the idea of 'electoral studies' it was taken up elsewhere. In Britain, for instance, the study of elections was guided by

1 This background is drawn from Carmines & Huckfield (1996), p 223.

'the accumulation of facts and statistics normally associated with the Nuffield electoral studies on party organisation, party finances, the candidates, the press and interest groups' (Blewett 1973, p 647). Far more interesting was the contribution made by the French sociologist and lawyer, Maurice Duverger,² whose 1952 book, *Les Partis Politiques*, opened up an insightful, though limited, way to theorise electoral politics.³

Not surprisingly, those, like myself, who are more interested in values are either disdainful of applied social sciences, or are interested in the regimes of power – to borrow a famous phrase from Michel Foucault – that run through all forms of knowledge, applied or other. But I am also interested in the role played by institutions that both catch and carry social 'knowing'; especially revealing is the potential of this knowledge to drive the project of emancipation. This is why my interest in the issue of elections, and their monitoring, is heightened on the occasion of this conference, which celebrates the first decade of EISA's work.

The above explains why this paper explores our understanding of the social world – what it is, what it tries to do. Understanding the social world of democracy and elections is highly paradoxical, as the following illustration suggests.

Until the US invasion of Iraq four years ago, it seemed obvious that 'promoting democracy' was better than supporting either authoritarianism or totalitarianism. Now, however, things do not seem as simple as all that in Iraq, and, indeed, elsewhere. As this paper was being drafted American options in Iraq were said to be under review: under discussion was one particular option that suggested that perhaps an 'authoritarian government [in Iraq] could help to restore order' in that country (BBC World 22 October 2006). To anyone interested in promoting the values of democracy and creating good citizens, this option sounds bizarre: evidence, surely, of a certain confusion and contrariness that dogs ways in which we try to understand the social world, especially in politics.

The drift towards this fuzzy logic is exacerbated by the 'fact' that this option was under consideration in a country that purports to have given the world the modern form of democracy. Indeed, the very place that was once famously hailed by two Frenchmen, Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont, as the epitome of democracy. The former, in particular, believed that America's democracy was a great social experiment which was an inspiring and instructive example to liberals everywhere. His message was repeated by successive generations of French writers: Brogan, Aron, Revel, Servan-Schreiber.

So what is going on?

To understand this paradox we must look beyond the notion that American

2 For a discussion of Duverger's career see Hoffmann-Martinot 2005, pp 304-9.

3 On the enduring influence of this book see Schlesinger & Schlesinger 2006, pp 58-68.

(or British, for that matter) democracy itself is in crisis – this, of course, is the parallel conversation that nowadays fills the daily analysis of the unfolding tragedy in Iraq. More particularly, attention needs to be turned to a series of questions that reach beyond the empty words about democracy generated by the policy-community. Good political sense (not an oxymoron but invariably ideological, as we will see), not to mention intellectual responsibility, requires critical scholarship to raise questions not only in uncomfortable times – as presently in Iraq – but all the time.

This calls for a particular kind of thinking – the kind that ‘dissolves all stable convictions and creeds’, which is what Hannah Arendt (the centenary of whose birth we celebrated this year) called ‘dangerous thinking’. For teachers this is the kind of thinking that requires us to encourage the questioning of everything, including the frameworks we use to say things. As the Dutch Nobel Laureate (in Physics), Gerard t’Hooft, argues, we should teach students to doubt everything we say. Or, as Arendt’s fellow émigré, Albert Einstein, famously said: ‘The important thing is not to stop questioning.’ This is plainly rather different from the kind of facts-*über-alles* that marked the pioneering work on elections carried out by Paul Lazarfeld and his colleagues referred to above.

The direction of the above suggests that this paper asks questions about the project of democracy which is EISA’s calling. This is certainly so, but more importantly it raises questions about the way in which we have come to understand things within the study of elections – the philosophy of science promised in the opening paragraphs. However, critique for its own sake is not only dull – notwithstanding its often effervescent (or impenetrable⁴) language – it is often pointless. The task of critical scholarship is not simply to moralise about values but to help steer humanity onto the path that will achieve the emancipatory values embedded in the Enlightenment (Mandle 2006, p 145). So, this paper is an exercise not only in theoretical rumination but also in practical politics.

Regrettably, writing on Southern Africa continues to be theoretically ‘lite’. Indeed, since the appearance nearly five years ago of my burdensome book *Politics and Security in South Africa: The Regional Dimension* (Vale 2003), nothing has appeared which tries to draw forward the conceptual discussion presented in that work. Put differently, and within the spirit of this paper, no new abstract questions have been asked about the region.⁵

4 I have intentionally included this phrase in parentheses because one of the reviewers of this piece raised issues about the inaccessibility of this discourse to lay readers. It seems important, however, to stress that readers of this journal are not ‘lay readers’ in the sense of readers of the daily press. And because they are mainly specialists in the field are we seriously to believe that they should not be stretched. As countless explanations in science have pointed out, paradigms can only be shifted by challenging accepted explanations – such challenges are most often carried by language and its use.

A very recent book, for example, Gabriël H. Oosthuizen's *The Southern African Development Community: The Organisation, its Policies and Prospects* (2006), provides a factual account of the state of regional play and offers a conventional analysis of its history. These accounts certainly have their place – and recognising this place is important – however, they are embedded in a particular narrative and mostly shy, as Oosthuizen does, away from any theoretical rumination.

And yet, even a thin deconstruction indicates that accounts which are embedded within the 'common sense' discourses which mark understandings and explanations of social relationships begin where they end, with renditions of the social derived from the disciplining power of economics. These, too, have their value. So, it is certainly true that economic-centred understandings of the region and its social ways have promoted a shift away from either arms or national politics as the determinants of the tide of Southern Africa affairs. But, and this is the point of the paper, these provide only a partial vision, which is far removed from the avowed purpose of liberal democracy.

Instead of full vision these debates have re-conceptualised 'civilization through the prism of economics', as John Ralston Saul (2004, p 37) has suggested. A deeper deconstruction reveals that politics-qua-politics has been substituted by endless and often directionless details of management which have been 'blended with sparkling waves of new technology and with masses of microeconomic data, all presented as...[regional] facts' (Saul 2004, p 35). This presents an account of the region which is 'monological, totalising and linear' (Brown 2006, p 691). This is the very stuff of the two regional organisations that matter most in the region – the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Southern African Economic Community (SACU).

If anything, the shift of organisational focus from politics to economics has changed the tone and direction of the debate in the region. Early resistance to this change in discourse – which included a defence of state-centred administrative structures and economic self-sufficiency, two important goals of the African nationalist project – now seems out of date when set against the purported power of 'freedom' offered by an agile and modern market-centred regional system. Here, once again, are echoes of Hannah Arendt's work. In her 1958 book, *The Human Condition*, Arendt was concerned about the tendency to make politics subservient to economics. She suggested that economics was once a secondary, private or household realm, but it now dominated the lives of ordinary citizens and of political leaders – through this, the 'economic sphere ... [has-subsumed] all others...' (Villa 2000, p 6).

5 Naison Ngoma's 2005 book, *Prospects for a Security Community in Southern Africa*, is a possible exception.

A little conceptual reflection suggests that by promoting the idea that economic relations matter more than all others primarily means that all social relations can only be secondary to those dominated by money and resources. In Southern Africa this has isolated politics, making it exceptional in the determination of any social relationship – and through this, as we shall come to see, the high purpose of electoral studies has been corroded.

But first we must reconsider the dearth of theoretical writing on the affairs of the Southern African region. The ontology of mainstream international relations, from which all policy interventions in the region derive, positions states (and their behaviour) at the very centre of understanding and explanation. '[T]his ... [is a] ... technique ...[of knowledge that] ... looks to the power of sovereign organization, and the rationality of capital in erasing any uncertainties from the affairs of the region ...' (Vale 2003, p 31). This idea is not uncontentious or even new. Indeed, Justin Rosenberg calls it the 'same old melodrama' of international relations and, following Martin Wight, describes it as 'impoverished'. To end this impoverishment, which only the foolhardy would support, critical scholarship must follow Rosenberg's goal of 'fundamentally reorient [ing] international theory' (Rosenberg 1996, p 6) – especially in Southern Africa. I return to this below.

Pre-conceptions of the region – the ontology that has already caught our attention – are wholly distorting. One reason for this is that the region's 'states' are cast in a timelessness which denies their recent vintage. Yes, social life in the region is ancient time-wise, as the archaeologists show, but political life – especially in its modern form – is ridiculously recent. As conferences like this seek out the anchors that can secure the 'governance' and 'security' the region desperately seeks, there is a singular failure to recognise that politics-qua-politics is just beginning. Therefore, there is no lasting evidence that the very vehicles chosen to carry the region's politics, its states, are at all suitable for the burdens foisted upon them.

Here, attention turns towards the state; the institution which has been charged with making the region's future, accounting for its present, and explaining its past.

Ideas of state formation and state building have proliferated in recent years and, for sake of brevity, these can be distilled into two strains – states formed from the power of irrigation agriculture and states that result from the place and position of worship (J Hall 2001, p 802). Plainly, the states of Southern Africa fit into neither of these categories. Nor are Southern African states readily explained by Benedict Anderson's now famous 'Imagined Communities' metaphor (Anderson 1991). Essentially then, the states of Southern Africa are not primary creations they are derivative of other social formations. But, like their progenitors, they are the result of a confluence of historical and material conditions and have

been shaped by the ever-determining influence of analysis and power. Unlike many other social fashions, however, the power and licence offered to states to organise – Max Weber's 'monopoly of the means of violence' – meant that it was unlikely that an institution thus shaped could quickly fade. As John A Hall (2001, p 803) remarks wryly, '[o]nce the state was invented, it could not be forgotten'.

As states took shape in Southern Africa the power of example was important. Especially influential was the role played by the South African state, particularly the commanding position of the forced homogeneity of the state *manqué* which was once called the 'Cape Colony'. This created particular form of politics, among whose many features was obsession with race and the influence of the power of wealth.

But there was a paradox at work in the formation of the region's states, and this has had a lasting impact on the region. The 'states' which were created in Southern Africa

developed within a space of contaminations and conceptual transitions which ... [were] ... profoundly marked by the continuous work of the translation of Western paradigms (first of all, certainly, Marxist) into contexts that were radically different from those in which these paradigms and concepts had originally been formulated.

Mezzadra 2006, p 537

Simply put, the institutional arrangements – not to mention the competing ideologies – of the region's states were wholly unsuited to local conditions.

Because the region is so poorly theorised, the issue of state formation in Southern Africa remains, like its politics, in its infancy. This lack of conceptual clarity prevents efforts to counter the controlling ideology which views social relations through the prism of economics. This, of course, is a problem of both method and analysis. Simply put, the orthodoxy views the states of the region as stable entities but, as we have seen, they are only partially so. As a result, Southern African states are continuously evolving and so often defy the rules and expectations that are held out for – and to – them. So, as the 'rules' of social control are applied, they are not wholly compliant because they are still in the very process of formation.

An understanding of this should have profound implications for 'Electoral Studies' – the question is, does it?

The problem posed by states in the region has been complicated by the triumph of rational choice theory and the regime of policy rationality which marks social analysis in Southern Africa and elsewhere. This approach conceives a world of stable and predictable interactions turning, as it insists, on (and to) the goal of

problem solving. In order to do this, it limits social relationships to fixed ratios; it objectifies human agency by restricting flexibility and replaces interactional causality with mechanistic causality. Its purpose, after all, is to produce predictable social behaviour (Young & Arrigo 1999, p 275). These are the very characteristics of the scenario-building fad, which has had, and continues to have, such a powerful influence throughout Southern Africa.

As the forced rationality has caught hold following the free-market revolution, the 'normative social fabric of self-interest' (Brown 2006, p 692) has increasingly come to dominate all forms of social analysis – electoral studies, as will become evident below, have not been exempted. This means, as stated above, extending the 'rationality of self-interest' to all areas of social life (see Hindess 1993, p 542).

Notwithstanding protests to the contrary, there is a dense ideological thicket here, primarily because the idea of 'self-interest' is presented as 'common sense'. As writers in cultural studies, in particular, insist, 'common sense' is not neutral, rather it is a place where ideology is most effectively concealed (See S Hall 1977). Blind to this, protagonists of the 'common sense' approach to the region claim they have no need for theory, under the guise that the facts will speak for themselves. But, as Jon Elster (1995, p 121) has argued, 'rational choice theory is first and foremost normative. It tells us what we ought to do in order to achieve our aims as closely as possible. It does not tell us ... what our aims ought to be ... the central *explananda* of rational choice theory are *actions*.' This brings the argument four square back to the place of economics in determining social relationships in the region.

While the rise of free-market economics was associated with the names of Thatcher and Reagan it was the generative work of a group of thinkers associated with the Austrian economist, Friedrich von Hayek, which was decisive. So, Hayek's 1944 book, *The Road to Serfdom*, was very influential because it was almost immediately positioned in the Cold War ideological setting by the conservative magazine, *The Reader's Digest*, which published the book in its Condensed Series a year later.

So, the spread of free-market economic theory was speeded by the Cold War but it was the post-Second World War desire to make the study of social relations 'value-free' that changed the project of the Enlightenment. As Richard Bourne described the post-war protagonists of social 'science', 'The war ... [has] ... revealed a younger intelligentsia ... who have been sucked into the councils of Washington. They have absorbed the secret of scientific method as applied to public administration' (quoted in Wolin 2004, p 518). As a result, all other approaches to social issues, outside the field of market economics, were said to be 'politically motivated' in their purpose or 'unscientific' in their method.

The policy triumph of 'free' market economics, however, came in the 1970s after a series of catastrophic events – these included rampaging inflation, crumbling exchange rates, and the oil crisis of 1973. (Indeed, the 40th anniversary of Ronald Reagan's victory as Governor of California occurred a week before this paper was delivered.)

In response to the purported failure of economics which were associated with the name of John Maynard Keynes, the idea that the market offered solutions to social issues – that is, viewing 'civilisation through the prism of economics' – were drawn to the fore. This occurred at the very moment that society, especially in the US, was increasingly attracted by conservative social values. A growing consensus (aka a new social fashion) implanted a management mantra at the intersection between state-based politics and economics: 'privatise, down-size, rationalise, and outsource'. This theory was aimed at positioning citizens as self-interested actors with a moral autonomy to be 'measured by their capacity for "self-care"' (Brown 2006, p 694). As countless writers have shown, this approach spread to the Global South through the influence of the international financial institutions, The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.⁶ Wendy Brown (2006, p 693) describes it as 'making a wreckage of efforts at democratic sovereignty or economic self-direction in the South'.

As this happened a kind of theology was at work. Consider this statement from Larry Summers, one-time Chief Economist at the World Bank. 'What can the West can do ... [in Russia]', he asked,

to drive this process of reform forward? Number one: it can spread the truth. The laws of economics, it's often forgotten that they are like the laws of engineering. There is only one set of laws and they work everywhere. One of the things I've learned in my short time at the World Bank is that whenever anybody says, 'But economics works differently here', they're about to say something dumb.

D Kennedy 2006, p 26

This was a compression of intense political and social relationships into a simple-minded rationality – a kind of slash-and-burn mentality. It has had a profound effect on contemporary social relationships and the way in which we know and describe them. This includes the micro-discipline of electoral studies, which is why it affects the work of EISA.

In order to illustrate these effects, we must ask how it is that policy-making has become first and foremost a 'declaratory process'. Take as an example the

⁶ Much of the above discussion has been culled from David Kennedy's impressive PhD thesis.

2005 drive to 'Make Poverty History', which was linked, first, to the 'Star appeal' of the rock icons, Bob Geldof and U2, and secondly to the so-called 'Gleneagles Agreement'. Apart from the glamour side of politics – Bono's famous description of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Chancellor, Gordon Brown, as the 'Lennon and McCartney of the global development stage' – the purpose of the exercise was to avoid the hard politics of global income distribution rather than confront the difficulties associated with correcting it.⁷ In other words, the 'Making Poverty History' exercise was an exercise in managing – through the manipulation of tropes – the existing patterns of global poverty and so of reinforcing the global status quo. Effectively, it aimed to de-democratise the issue of poverty.

This is an approach far removed from confronting the structural problems – either security or economic – which are faced by developing countries; in effect it is the substitution of policy by political rhetoric. Put differently, the power of rhetoric has supplanted the need to adopt policies which aim at redress, let alone equality. In significant ways the power of the discourse about issues like 'Global Terror' and the 'War on Terror', with its powerful and theological distinction between the forces of 'Good' and the forces of 'Evil', has only reinforced such policy non-outcomes.

Understanding the emergence of 'non-policy', as we might call this, raises three questions that have largely been hidden by the argument thus far. What is the role in this of electoral studies? Is electoral studies complicit in this triumph of political rhetoric over lived reality? And what should be the role of electoral studies?

To answer these questions we must again turn to the theorist Sheldon Wolin (1977, pp 91-105), who writes:

[t]he version of theory which political scientists borrowed from their colleagues in the more 'advanced' social sciences was remarkable not only for its tendency to associate theory with 'methodology' but for its distinct hostility towards history and philosophy. As a consequence, this new form of theory had nothing significant to say about the issues which dominated the politics of the twentieth century: war, totalitarianism, democracy, imperialism, racial oppression, ecological policy and corporate power.

This suggests that social enquiry is largely ahistorical and devoid of any form of social engagement. Its purpose, it seems, is to manage social relations rather than understand them; to exercise social surveillance rather than promote

7 For a recent discussion of this see Payne 2006, pp 917-35.

emancipation; to narrow rather than expand the range of human experience. It does so, as we have noted, by reifying social relationships; by objectifying human agency; and by relying on the power of mechanistic causality.

The impact of this approach on the technique of electoral studies is plain. Although interested in developing a 'democratic citizenry', 'electoral studies' has largely eschewed the region's rich historical sociology. Instead, it seems preoccupied with the tropes of 'accountability', 'transparency' and 'governance', which have limited the subject in the region essentially to a state-based enterprise. This has made much of the writing on Southern African elections like a re-run of the mid- and late-1960s discourse about African nationalism – indeed, is 'electoral studies' not simply another debate about African nationalism, in the guise of democracy, rather than, as it once was, state-building?

Can electoral studies reverse this direction? To do so, it must understand, rather than manage, social relationships; it must encourage emancipation rather than promote surveillance; and it will have to expand, rather than narrow, the range of human experience in the region. To achieve this, the study of elections – or what we know as electoral studies – in Southern Africa needs to make two moves.

- It must follow Justin Rosenberg backwards, directly into the nexus between political theory and practice, which it has avoided. Only this journey will enable electoral studies to recover Leon Trotsky's 'remarkable idea of "uneven and combined development"' (Rosenberg 2006, p 309). Together with the derived doctrine of 'permanent revolution', the theory of 'uneven and combined development' was Trotsky's 'major contribution' to Marxist thought (Bottomore et al (eds) 1991, p 546). At its base is a very modern, even perhaps, post-modern current – namely, 'that people from different centuries co-exist'. Put differently, human existence and experience is uneven or, less prosaically, human society (and history) always involves a 'multiplicity of temporally co-existing instances, levels and forms of society' (Rosenberg 2006, p 314). So, variety, not hegemony or monotony, which are carried by both the mantra and the cliché, are the defining features of the world – diversity reveals itself not only among civilisations (and states) but within them too. Each cultural and geographical area comprises an array of political entities; each of these, in turn, displays individual characteristics and ever further shades of unevenness (Rosenberg 2006, p 315). The unevenness of the social world is 'overlain by ... asynchronous simultaneity' (Rosenberg 2006, p 315). So, all societies are at particular

and different points in their historical lives at the same moment. As a result, Southern Africa lives in different centuries simultaneously. Even the development of capitalism in the region has been irregular, contrary to what Marx predicated. The challenge of democracy in Southern Africa is not a problem of space but of political organisation. So, to expect, as electoral studies does, uniformity of progress and prosperity even in the process of election monitoring is unrealistic. But understanding this, and what it means for an applied social study like electoral studies, will require unlearning an increasingly loaded and self-referential technical language which is embedded in what Foucault called 'capillaries of power'.

- Electoral studies must accept that economics, for all its claim to exceptionalism, cannot be divorced from its subservience to everyday social practice. Economics-directed policy cannot, therefore, be implemented without an intense and ongoing reference to the society in which it takes place – and, in this sense, 'society' refers to human interests understood in terms of human development and freedom. The latter, of course, are very real-world goals that the creation of the micro-discipline of electoral studies set out to achieve. It will be difficult to overcome this gap because the corpus of the micro-discipline is so bound up with a version of 'management studies', with its strong emphasis on description and the control of all social relationships. The language of electoral studies is imbued with the same expert tongue that aims primarily to discipline all the social affairs of the region. This code of behaviour is carried forward by the now familiar mantra 'accountability', 'governance' and 'transparency': it reinforces the idea that ideology has ended, as Francis Fukayama famously declared. The impact of this on the everyday world of policy is devastating, as can be seen in relation to the issue of regional migration. More recently came the gormless declaration by South Africa's finance ministry that it will seek to review the distribution of revenues in the Southern African Customs Union (*Business Times* 29 October 2006). Devoid of an historical appreciation of the role the region played in the making of modern South Africa, this 'outcomes-based' form of politics is highly extractive. It is inspired by technocratic language and deeply influenced by the intrusive role in the social world played by think tanks which seek to advance the common sense politics boldly set out in Larry Summers's analogy with engineering. In driving and, yes, securing this outcome 'the

language and metaphors of work – rules, designs, means and ends – have assumed a dominant place with the conceptions of Hannah Arendt's *vita activa*

Baehr 2000, p xxxi

There will certainly be fierce resistance both to these moves and to the overall thrust of this paper. And yet, the contamination of the high ideals of democracy and elections is everywhere to be seen.

Richard Calland warned of this in his recent book, *The Anatomy of South Africa* (2006, pp 266-7), in which he describes his experience with corporate sponsorship of South Africa's 'Independent Electoral Commission'.

So why was Mr Coca-Cola the ham in this illustrious sandwich? ...When I approached Mr Tisani (Director of Public Affairs at Coca-Cola), he jovially replied that Coca-Cola were the sponsors of the banquet as part of their overall support for the IEC. I asked how much they had donated, and Mr Tisani replied, 'We support democracy in the region by supporting electoral institutions, including the IEC, because we don't want to get into partisan funding' ... [Then the following exchange on the same night with another businessman] ... I asked how business was, 'Hey man,' the black dude said, 'this democracy is just *great* for making money.'

Surely what Calland is suggesting is that corporate support for the elections in South Africa, in the guise of common sense, indicates the danger of compromise in the acceptability of the process? Can elections that are supported by corporations be judged to be free and fair? These are the kinds of questions that face those engaged in electoral studies.

In Southern Africa this market-driven interest in the policy process has, if anything, become more brazen since apartheid ended. A year ago, the famous South African family, the Oppenheims, who control the giant diamond monopoly, De Beers, embarked on a campaign to re-position themselves and their interests in the politics of South (and Southern) Africa. Integral to this process was the founding of a 'think tank' called 'The Brenthurst Foundation', which aims to promote 'more public advocacy of open markets and good governance'. Asked by a reporter, Nic Dawes, whether they were not 'concerned that ... [the foundation would be] ... accused of being an instrument for policy capture in countries where they have commercial interests' Jonathan Oppenheimer, son of the current De Beers Chairman, and heir to the empire, Nicholas Oppenheimer, replied, 'What's wrong with policy capture ... if it's good policy?' (*Mail & Guardian*

9-14 December 2005). Building democracy, as we have recently learnt in Iraq, can be a fickle business easily manipulated by special interests.

Historian Paul Kennedy (2006, p 23) recently reminded readers of *The New York Review of Books* of Charles de Gaulle's remark that the 20th century had 'not been kind to Africa'. This is one explanation of the hype around what democracy can deliver to the continent in these, the first years of the 21st century. Studying elections, as the undoubted success of EISA has shown, has been a force in promoting the idea that democracy represents progress. Certainly, this has played a role in making the states of the region kinder to their people, but is it enough to meet social and cultural needs in an authentic fashion?

Only by accepting the veracity of Walter Benjamin's famous statement that every document of civilisation is also a document of barbarism can electoral studies encourage the idea that its command of knowledge is little more than another acquiescent intellectual fad.

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