

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

## *The Political Challenge in Southern Africa*

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### ABSTRACT

*Placing 'liberal democracy' as a polar opposite to 'participatory democracy' is less than helpful, particularly in the African situation. In this article I suggest an alternative approach to democracy which I think is more constructive, and which, equally, I think, will prove useful in guiding our thinking about political participation.*

### INTRODUCTION

Public participation in political processes is viewed by scholars and democrats as a virtue in its own right and a fundamental dimension of democracy. 'A healthy democracy,' note the editors of a book, published by the Human Sciences Research Council, on *Public Participation in Democratic Governance in South Africa*, 'is generally seen as one in which the citizens participate regularly in formal political activities, despite the lack of agreement among scholars about the required nature and degree of participation' (Houston, Humphries & Liebenberg 2001, p 2).<sup>1</sup> They go on to cite Diamond, Linz & Lipset (1995) as defining a democratic system as one in which there is:

- meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups, especially political parties, for all effective positions of government power through regular, free and fair elections that exclude the use of force;
- a highly inclusive level of political participation in the election of leaders and policies, such that no major (adult) social group is prevented from exercising the rights of citizenship;

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<sup>1</sup> The author is grateful to the Human Sciences Research Council for granting gratis permission to quote extensively from this publication.

- a level of civil and political liberties – freedom of thought and expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and demonstration, freedom to form and join organisations, freedom from terror and unjustified imprisonment – secured through political equality under a rule of law, sufficient to ensure that citizens (acting individually and through various associations) can develop and advocate their views and interests and contest policies and offices vigorously.

Yet, while this is an important start, other scholars (Huber, Rueschmeyer & Stephens) cited by Houston, Humphries & Liebenberg also insist upon a fourth dimension of democracy, involving: '[a]ccountability of the state's administrative organs to the elected representatives' (which we might note interlocks with electoral and party competition, given that elections constitute an opportunity for electorates to hold representatives accountable).

I have borrowed so freely from Houston, Humphries & Liebenberg because – rather than my re-inventing the wheel about so vast a subject – their work provides a useful condensation of a conventional approach to the study of democracy, which views 'liberal democracy' as either a competing model with, or as one end of a spectrum from, 'participatory democracy'. Against this, of course, there are those who would appear to place 'liberal democracy' in the middle of a spectrum which places 'quasi' or 'formal' democracy – that is, systems which display democratic features while lacking democratic substance – as the polar opposite of participatory democracy.

I am not going to enter into a discussion here about the differential merits of the two approaches for, in my view, this is easily as much an issue of utility (that is, what purposes definitions of democracy are being used for) as it is of achieving consensus about definitions. However, what is common to both is the language of 'democratic deepening': a participatory democracy in which the mass of citizens regularly involve themselves in political decision-making would be said to be 'deeper' than a 'liberal democracy' in which – whilst possessing a battery of rights – their active political participation was restricted to occasional visits to the ballot box.

This, of course, is not in itself to indicate that 'participatory' democracy would definitely be 'better than' 'liberal democracy', for some theorists would argue that the former will lead to democratic excess, whereas the latter has in-built protections of property, minorities, or whatever. How we decide what is 'better' or 'worse' for democracy depends, of course, upon our normative assumptions. This is a debate which can run and run and need not detain us here – even though a return to discussion involving normative assumptions will prove unavoidable later in my argument.

My view is that the placing of 'liberal democracy' as a polar opposite to 'participatory democracy' is less than helpful, most certainly in the African situation. I will, therefore, suggest an alternative approach to democracy which I think is more constructive, and which, equally, I think, will prove useful in guiding our thinking about political participation. However, to reach that point, it will be necessary to explore briefly how our two competing models (or poles) of democracy have been realised in Africa and, most notably, within our more immediate region, and the dilemmas they have confronted or produced.

### LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Most observers would agree that the history of liberal democracy in (sub-Saharan) Africa has been rather dismal. Even a cursory mention of key factors underlines this. There were numerous ideas and political practices in indigenous African societies which we would term 'democratic', yet 'liberal democracy' – as formulated by Western theorists – was a Western import to Africa, introduced initially by colonial regimes which had not practised in their colonies what they came to preach in the run-up to independence. This had two major aspects.

The first was that 'liberalism' became identified by African rulers (and many intellectuals) for whom its liberating implications were to prove inconvenient as associated with Western imperialism. The result was outright abolition or systematic abuse of the basic freedoms (of opposition, speech, assembly, and from torture, and so on) in country after country in Africa. In South Africa, meanwhile, because non-revolutionary white opponents of the apartheid regime, notably a succession of parties which participated in the racially restricted parliaments, proclaimed themselves as 'liberals', liberalism (as a set of principles and ideas) was too readily dismissed as hypocritical or inherently and/or covertly supportive of apartheid and imperialism by many connected with the liberation movements. (In contrast, of course, many writers – from John Plamenatz to Ali Mazrui – have demonstrated that in numerous ways liberal ideas were actually corrosive of imperialism.)<sup>2</sup>

A second, equally important aspect is that whereas liberal democracy had evolved organically (which, it is important to stress, is not to say that it occurred peacefully) in countries such as Britain and the United States of America it was imported into African societies in which the conditions for its existence were barely there: established liberal democracies in the West were overwhelmingly industrial societies, African ones were not; Western societies were class based,

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2 See, for instance, the fine book by John Plamenatz (1961). Mazrui's early work was full of references to the way European political ideas helped undermine the colonial edifice in Africa, eg, Mazrui 1967.

with established bourgeoisies who had wrested rights from previously ruling aristocracies and organised working class movements which had made their own demands on bourgeoisies; African societies were tribe, lineage or clan based, with only small emergent bourgeoisies with close ties to the state and small working classes whose organisations were often to be controlled or suppressed by nationalist and liberation movements after independence.

Broad-based political economies in the West had provided, historically, for balances of power (and hence checks and balances) among rival classes and within state institutions, whereas mineral or agricultural export-oriented colonial economies prescribed close connections between the economy and the state (often institutionalised via nationalisation of production and/or marketing) in independent African countries; and not least, of course, whereas militarism (in the form of fascism) had been defeated in the West in 1945, newly formed African militaries were to prove apt at taking advantage of the economic and political failures of civilian regimes from the mid-1960s through to the late 1980s.

In these circumstances, participation by the public in Africa in political processes was extremely limited. Where independence had been won, it was severely inhibited, if not suppressed. Meanwhile, in the settler-ruled political economies of Southern Africa, the majority was largely excluded, on the basis of race, from participation. Yet a rapidly moving history, in the form of the end of Cold War Western and Soviet rivalries in Africa, along with the externally-induced decline of African economies (via unequal exchange, decline of relevant terms of trade and so on) and internally-induced contractions (notably mass protest against oppression and armed struggle against late colonialism and apartheid in Southern Africa) were to bring about a democratic renewal in the 1990s.

The impact of the return to democracy was highly uneven, for far too many states were plunged into civil war and/or collapse. Yet many African states found themselves now embracing the basic tenets of liberal democracy via the re-constitutionalisation of liberal rights and, most notably, multipartyism and competitive elections. This found resonance in South Africa, too, where the negotiated transition of 1994 was founded upon the adoption of a Constitution (finalised in 1996) which was one of the most advanced democratic instruments that the world had yet seen (amplifying conventional liberal democratic rights with recognition of the putative socio-economic rights of citizens).

How has public participation in Africa fared amid this new re-assertion of the liberal democratic formula? I am going to restrict myself to four major points.

First, competitive electoralism has apparently come to stay, providing hugely important freedoms of association and expression. Of major importance is the fact that almost all regimes recognise a need for electoral legitimacy (the ability to claim support from their populations, as demonstrated by regular, fair

and free elections). This need for democratic legitimacy is recognised even by those regimes which manifestly abuse power, so that even where, for instance, inconvenient election results are effectively overturned (as with the presidential election in Zimbabwe in March 2008), they tend – Alice in Wonderland-like – to be transformed into victories (as in the second round of the Zimbabwean 2008 presidential election, where regime repression led to the withdrawal of opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai, allowing Robert Mugabe to ‘win’).<sup>3</sup>

Importantly, the return of electoralism has provoked a wide-ranging, continuous and at times innovative debate about the appropriateness of inherited electoral systems and has embraced a new recognition of the need for fair representation of segments of the population (majorities such as women, minorities such as ethnic groups) in legislatures and state institutions. In Southern Africa, following the adoption of national list system proportional representation in Namibia in 1989 and in South Africa from 1994, by far the most exciting development has been the adoption of mixed member proportional representation (MMP) in Lesotho from 2002, following plurality elections in 1993 and 1998 which, although fairly conducted, produced imbalanced results which provoked political instability by leaving the opposition without representation in the key house of Parliament.

The form of MMP adopted in Lesotho (the addition of a national list contest for an additional 40 seats to secure ultimate proportionality in parallel to elections for an existing 80 first-past-the-post constituency seats) subsequently provided for the proper representation of opposition parties in Parliament via the 2002 election, providing a firmer basis for representative democracy. Even though the spirit of MMP was subsequently to be undermined by the political practices of the ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy in the 2007 election (when that party formed a pre-election alliance with a minor opposition party and ran a number of the other party’s candidates under its name in the PR election in order to amplify its overall majority (Elklit 2008, pp 10-19)), the switch to the new electoral system has remained an important development, pointing the way to how representativeness (the chief merit of national list PR) can be combined with the accountability of elected members of Parliament (a key aspect of constituency based systems).

Even so, the practice of electoral democracy has been widely flawed and the result has been that far too many African elections record hollow victories for ruling parties. Citizens are free to form political parties to challenge ruling

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3 The presidential candidate, Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change, was placed ahead of Mugabe in the presidential poll, although because of massive state terror he ultimately chose to withdraw from competing in the (unconstitutionally delayed) second-round poll (required because he had narrowly failed to gain a 50.1% majority). This cleared the way for the unchallenged re-election of Mugabe to the presidency.

parties and, as a result, elections are usually contests among myriad competitors. Nonetheless, in countries where ruling parties enjoy the genuine support of a majority of the population (as in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia), the resulting dominance of those parties can result in arrogance and illiberalism, intolerance of minorities, and reluctance of rulers to render themselves adequately accountable to those who elect them. Meanwhile, in those countries where ruling parties fear they do not have the support of the majority they often resort to suppression of freedoms and manipulation of the electoral game to guarantee their return to office (for example, the Kenya African National Union (Kanu) in 1992 and 1997, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) in successive elections from 1990, the Movement for Multi Party Democracy in Zambia in 2001 and 2006). However, as Kenneth Kaunda and his United National Independent Party were to discover in 1990 and as the defeat of Kanu at the end of 2002 demonstrates, this does not mean that decaying regimes can cling to power forever, for their very failures or incapacities of rule (notably in the sphere of economic management) generate popular oppositions which can longer be denied. Even in Zimbabwe, where the peculiarly recalcitrant Zanu-PF regime has long demonstrated its determination to resist challenge through concerted and massive repression of domestic opposition, economic collapse has forced it into an unwanted coalition with the emergent Movement for Democratic Change (MDC, which won the parliamentary elections in 2008)<sup>4</sup> and wrestling with the problem of how to gainsay future repeat victories for the MDC at the polls.

Second, the idea of political representation of classes, groups and diverse opinions and interests is central to the idea of liberal democracy, notably through the instrument of political parties. However, despite some evidence that 'civil society' (that hotly disputed term!) has become a greater presence in African polities during the latest phase of democracy, the issue of political representation remains extremely problematic. Now, of course, any analysis of political representation in established liberal democracies will demonstrate that access to political decision-makers is heavily skewed in favour of the richest and most powerful elements of society; so political representation in those countries is highly problematic too. However, the problems are multiplied in African societies, not least because political parties are, on the whole, considerably weaker than they are in the West.

Early structural functionalist literature informed us that political parties served the 'functions' of 'interest aggregation and articulation'.<sup>5</sup> Yet any suggestion that they serve such functions uncomplicatedly in Africa needs to be

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4 For a valuable overview of these elections, see Masunungure 2009.

5 For example, Almond 1970.

queried. Traditionally, we are told, political parties in Europe (especially) and North America represented classes (as well as religious and regional interests and so on). However, the representation of classes itself assumes the existence of nations and nation-states. In Africa, by contrast, post-colonies are, with only occasional exceptions (Lesotho?), only 'nations in the making', which are divided along lines of ethnicity and, in Southern Africa, also along lines of race. In the absence of national unity, political parties have therefore tended to represent rival ethnic groups (or ethnic coalitions) rather than classes. They have often tended to be exclusive rather than inclusive.

Otherwise, parties have served their functions of 'aggregation and articulation' of interests very imperfectly: apart from functioning poorly, intermittently, and usually being dominated by their leaders, they have tended to substitute domination and incorporation of groups and diverse opinions for representation. Party women's and youth groups, for instance, have commonly been instruments of 'interest suppression or control' as much as they have been vehicles of 'articulation and aggregation'. Similarly, trade unions allied to ruling parties have often been denied autonomy, while traditional leaders have similarly been brought to heel.<sup>6</sup> Ruling parties, in short, have attempted to impose their domination upon society, not least by too often identifying political opposition with treason.

To be sure, considerable advances have been made with regard to political representation and public participation in politics, especially in some of the societies of Eastern and Southern Africa, during the latest wave of democracy, with Botswana and South Africa the most visible exemplars of functioning 'representative democracies'. But even in these countries political representation is far from being unproblematic. Hence Ken Good (1997, chap 1), for example, refers to 'Authoritarian liberalism' in Botswana, noting, for instance, the government's attempts to inhibit the media on sensitive issues (Good 1997, ch 1). In South Africa, meanwhile, critics claim that internal democracy within the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance has fallen foul of 'democratic centralism', and demands for accountability emanating from the historically white opposition parties, whatever their justification, are, too often for comfort, dismissed as racist.

A third problem relates to constitutionalism and citizenship. Those constitutions in Africa which enshrine democracy are suitably sound founding documents, replete with guarantees of political and, certainly in South Africa's case, social and economic freedoms. Yet in country after country (and most certainly not just in contemporary Zimbabwe), basic human rights are abused and trampled upon, often in the vilest manner: state violence is regularly visited

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6 On relations between ruling parties and trade unions, see Beckman, Buhlungu & Sachikonye 2010.

upon government opponents in many countries, and brutality and torture within institutions of incarceration is systematic, unprotected by (often noble) judiciaries and other organs of accountability.

In Swaziland, meanwhile, the new Constitution continues to deny even basic rights of association to political parties, all in the name of Swazi tradition. Rights guaranteed by constitutions are either unrealised (notably in the case of women, for even the most advanced African democracies remain highly patriarchal) or systematically denied to certain categories of the population.

In Botswana, for example, the San are formally Botswana citizens, yet they are subject not just to ethnic stereotyping as inferior to 'real Batswana' but are subject to a resettlement policy that harks back in no uncertain terms to the worst excesses of forced removals under apartheid (Good 2002, pp 185-206). In South Africa, 'permanent residents' are denied the right to vote in national and provincial elections as well as access to important welfare benefits, whatever their past or present contribution to the economy: effectively, citizenship becomes two-tier, with no cognisance given to the classic rallying call of the American Revolution: 'No Taxation without Representation!'

The fourth problem relates to the intersection of money and democracy. Political parties everywhere exist for the acquisition by groups or categories of people of overt or covert influence over policymaking and implementation, as well as access to resources. The vast amounts of money that circulate at election time in the United States demonstrate crudely and forthrightly that, to a very considerable extent, public policy and decisions are for sale to the highest bidder in contemporary liberal democracy, even if the return to those who fund political parties is indirect. Corporations do not fund the two major political parties in the US out of altruism but because they expect that whoever wins, be it Democrats or Republicans, will repay the favour generously once they are in power. Numerous funding scandals indicate that similar expectations operate in Europe, even if less brazenly than in the US. Even so, the intensity of financial and political competition in advanced liberal democracies is reduced by the fact that the government's involvement in the economy is counterbalanced by the operations of the market, and that corporate survival and profitability rest primarily upon corporations' ability to compete against each other (even if such competition is oligarchical).

In contrast, in Africa, even in these days where conversion to pro-market reforms has become uniform, the state plays a much more central role in the economy, precisely because – with the partial exception of South Africa – capitalist markets are less advanced: they tend to be export-oriented, highly dependent upon government contracts, and dominated by foreign companies, and the public service (and its extensions in parastatals) is the major source of employment. In this context, the lobbying of state officials by corporations and



business interests for contracts and favours which takes place in Europe and America is no less intense in Africa, with bribery and all sorts of backhanders, together with corporate funding of political parties (overwhelmingly of those in power) coming to play a significant role in decision-making about the allocation of resources by government.<sup>7</sup>

Necessarily, such deals are hidden from the public view, as they are designed to unfairly advantage ruling parties and enrich well-placed individuals. Yet apart from distorting the outcomes of decision-making, they reinforce what analysts such as Ken Good (2002) deem to be the inherently oligarchical, elite nature of liberal democracy. Overwhelmingly, decisions are made and policies pursued that favour the interests of the rich over the poor: the lobbying of government by elites becomes much more salient politically than participation by a 'public' which, although able to provide political input (via the media, parliamentary committees etc), lacks financial clout and otherwise only possesses intermittent veto power (via the vote, strikes, demonstrations).

Yet if the practice of liberal democracy is highly flawed, does 'participatory democracy' provide a realistic alternative?

#### PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR AFRICA?

If public participation is deemed to be a public good it might be presumed that it should be maximised via participatory democracy. Indeed, this assumption is inherent in much public debate, especially in South Africa, where the goal is often espoused of our making our democracy 'more participatory'. Yet things are not quite as easy as they might seem.

To begin, it is wise to distinguish between 'direct' and 'participatory' democracy. Literally speaking, 'democracy' means 'rule by the people', yet this is regarded by democratic theorists as an unrealisable ideal. As noted by Norman Barry (1989, p 261) this is because, on the one hand, 'direct democracy' – 'a system in which decision-taking and law-making is a function of the whole community unmediated by any form of representation' – is impossible to achieve in all but the smallest of societies. On the other hand, the idea of people 'ruling' over themselves implies that the majority will shall prevail, which – on the basis that all people are deemed to enjoy political equality – tends to take us back to the idea of elections and representative democracy.

In contrast, theorists of participatory democracy recommend that politics should be a *continuing* activity and not just be confined to voting in elections at

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7 Direct and indirect (and illegal) funding of ruling parties by parastatals is also proving to be important (and highly controversial) in South Africa (Southall 2008, pp 103-121. However, this is an aspect which requires systematic research on a regional basis.

regular intervals. Inspired by the ideas of Rousseau it is argued that decision-making should be taken away from the bureaucratic state and devolved to smaller communities that will enable individuals and groups to produce laws and policies directly related to their needs. Participation will also be facilitated by such devices as referenda and other means of ensuring close consultation between government and people.

Meanwhile, just as Rousseau held that the General Will would be realised if individuals were imbued with public spirit and were approximately equal, so contemporary theories of participation see people being 'moralised' through the process of democratic consultation and interaction: selfish motivations which might lead to anti-social outcomes will tend to be harnessed for the public good under the right conditions (Barry 1989, p 283).

There are numerous difficulties with this schema. A first problem is that if the conditions for curbing people's selfish agendas cannot be realised the outcome will more likely be Rousseau's 'will of all' (the sum total of individual wills) than the 'General Will': or, in other words, there will continue to be divisions between majorities and minorities. Individuals may be able to escape domination by majorities with which they disagree or deem oppressive by moving to other communities, yet, in the real world, mobility is likely to be limited.

Meanwhile, even if the people's capacity is enhanced by the devolution by governments of powers to local communities, the issue of aggregating, assessing and realising public desires at the national level remains. Furthermore, as elite theorists have long pointed out, the widening of opportunities for political participation will tend to favour those who enjoy, or who have a particular talent for, participating: hence, they argue, elites will tend to emerge just as much under participatory systems as under other political systems, a tendency which will be reinforced the larger the unit of participation concerned. What is more, the immediate benefits to the individual of participating in politics for a selfish, sectional interest are likely to outweigh those which are defined by a longer-term, public interest. Hence we get back to the idea of the importance of the traditional machinery of constitutionalism which is so central to liberal democracy: the separation of powers, the rule of law, judicial review and so on. Such institutions, at their best, are intended to curb illiberal excess and to institutionalise the moral values which guide democracy (Barry 1989, pp 283-5).

Despite these difficulties the idea of 'participatory democracy' still retains a powerful hold upon the popular imagination in Africa, especially in Southern Africa. As Ken Good has elaborated at length, this is at one level because of widespread popular disillusionment with the limited returns to ordinary people of electoral democracy, notably as it has been practised during the latest, post-Cold War wave (Good 2002). Parliamentary checks and balances, as written

into constitutions, have been nullified by the dominance of ruling parties; PR electoral systems may have enhanced representivity, but they have diminished the accountability to their electorates of parliamentarians because they have concentrated power in the hands of party leaders; opposition parties are weak and fail to constitute 'alternative governments'; the centralisation of power in the hands of presidents promotes autocracy, elite rule, corruption and state profligacy; and so on. Given these huge failings, he argues the necessity for African societies to turn towards participatory democracy.

Good finds the immediate inspiration for this in the political practices of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) under apartheid. From the Durban strikes of 1973 onward black workers in South Africa forged a democratic movement inside 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 by the UDF and Cosatu as entailing:

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

Good 2002, p 178

A survey of the political attitudes of Cosatu workers undertaken just prior to the country's first democratic election, in 1994, confirmed how strongly black trade unionists transformed their commitments to participatory democracy into similar expectations about parliamentary democracy: they expected the ANC to consult them on all issues that affected them and to report back on all related decisions. If the party and its representatives in Parliament did not do what its supporters required of it, it should be subject to recall (Ginsburg, Webster, Southall, Wood, Buhlungu, Maree, Cherry, Haines & Klerck 1995, p 49).

Good goes on to argue that, faced with an internal culture of participatory democracy that threatened the elitist practices which it had long honed in exile, the ANC moved quickly to shut the UDF down. In contrast, Cosatu's industrial strength was such that a labour-repressive policy was not possible and the

ANC was constrained to erect a relatively labour-friendly industrial regime. Subsequently, 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, nor, indeed, has an industrialised working class demonstrated such capacity to challenge the power of autocratic elites anywhere else on the continent. Nonetheless, Good is disappointingly vague about how participatory democracy in South Africa can be revived and sustained, referring only to that challenge as 'an unending struggle'.<sup>8</sup> All in all, his celebration of this heroic and highly admirable political practice of the 1980s and early 1990s seems to have run up against many of the difficulties enumerated above. Participatory democracy, he seems to be reluctantly conceding, may be attainable in certain unusual historical circumstances, yet is inherently fragile: a rare utopia!

#### A WAY FORWARD FOR PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY?

In this brief article I have sketched out in highly rudimentary fashion key problems with both liberal and participatory democracy as they have been implemented and experienced in Africa. We might summarise this by lamenting and contrasting the oligarchical nature of the former with the utopian dimensions of the latter. So, how are we to move beyond this impasse, save by simply seeking to make liberal democracy more participatory, as implied by the idea of the democratic spectrum to which I referred at the beginning? Building upon ideas I have expressed elsewhere (Southall 2003) I would propose that we should argue for a conception of democracy which:

- recognises the fundamental importance of a number of liberal tenets: notably a constitution to 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

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8 'The Unending Struggle' is the title of Good's final chapter in *The Liberal Model in Africa*.

a competitive party system, will be an inescapable element for authorising and coordinating these activities;

- demands that state officials and political representatives be held to continuous and systematic account. Such a system would require absolute transparency and public access to all information and documents relating to government activities, except in very limited areas;
- restricts the influence of moneyed interests by setting unambiguous and strict limits to political party funding, which should be wholly open to public scrutiny, and by devising and enforcing rigorous standards of corporate governance;
- ensures societal conditions that facilitate political participation. However, although citizens should not normally be forced to participate in politics,<sup>9</sup> they should be obliged to accept democratic decisions unless these can be proved to have violated their rights;
- recognises that in order to create conditions for political equality grossly unequal distribution of material resources should be disallowed. Political equality demands a tough conception of distributive justice which will recognise the necessity of minimising inequality in the ownership of control of the means of production. The right to private ownership must be recognised as a fundamental condition of democracy. Equally, however, democracy demands that there must be clear restrictions on private ownership;
- 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 the scope to accumulate vast resources at the expense of others.<sup>10</sup>

Is such a conception of participation and democracy as utopian as the vision of participatory democracy I have criticised unrealistic and unsustainable? I do not

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<sup>9</sup> I use the word 'normally' as I, personally, am very open to the idea that, as in Australia, citizens should be legally required to vote in elections.

<sup>10</sup> Beware both corporate CEOs and brazen politicians!

think so. Indeed, I think it is necessary, for we live in a world whose very survival is being rendered increasingly endangered, both ecologically and politically, by massively widening and utterly obscene wealth and power differentials between the globally rich and strong and the globally poor and weak which have been hugely encouraged during the present era of rampant (albeit crisis fraught) capitalism. Indeed, it is not difficult to argue that in South Africa, the most unequal society in the world, the prospects for democracy are becoming increasingly blighted by widening not narrowing wealth differentials between the top and bottom people in our society as the economy seeks to 'compete' in the global market economy.

Perhaps the pursuit of a more participatory democracy must start at home, yet it cannot – and should not – be divorced from assertive steps taken by the poorer countries of the South for a much fairer, more equal and therefore safer world.

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