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**DEMOCRACY, TRADITIONAL  
LEADERSHIP AND THE  
INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY  
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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# Democracy, Traditional Leadership and the International Economy in South Africa

## Abstract

*The paper argues that in order to adequately analyse the development of post-colonial democracy – in this case South Africa – a theoretical model has to take into account the context within which that democratic experiment finds itself in. This context is shaped by the international political economy, the circulation of a democracy discourse at both the level of global and local political culture, and the history of state-formation. The paper explores what might explain the resurgence of purportedly ‘traditional’ modes of governance, symbolised by the ‘chief’ across several rural landscapes. It argues that the inability of the state to affect fundamental changes in the social, political and economic conditions of the rural hinterlands has created a situation in which local power holders are able to redefine traditional cultural values. In the process of doing so, these local power holders both shape and are shaped by a global discourse of what democracy might be and mean. The paper highlights the debate concerning notions of “African” forms of democracy, embodied most starkly by some of Nelson Mandela’s writings, which hold that village level deliberation and chieftaincy based upon community consensus may be more appropriate models of democracy than western versions based upon the notions of electoral contestation. This argument stands in sharp contrast to conventional approaches to democracy which would suggest that traditional leadership is an anachronism of lesser developed countries and stands in contrast to western democratic norms and values.*

# Introduction

This paper examines the unexpected return to prominence, the re-invention and resurgence of traditional leadership structures in some rural parts of South Africa. This despite the commitments to democratic, elected governance enshrined in the constitution, adopted and endorsed by all the political parties and expressed in all aspects of the political system introduced in 1994. At both the formal and informal level of political action, traditional leadership has returned to the centre of rural politics and not just in South Africa but in many spaces and places across the post-colony countries. Reports from Melanesia, Polynesia, many parts of Africa, Asia, Latin America, even North America and Europe indicate that self-described 'traditional' forms of governance are successfully resisting attempts to assign them to the archives of the past (White and Lindstrom, 1997). Not only have such forms of governance survived the coming of modernity in the sense of democratic governance based on the individual franchise, elected representation and accountable governmentality but they are also being re-invented in all sorts of hybrid forms to suit their new context. What might explain such an unexpected phenomenon? Does this re-emergence indicate a danger for democracy or is it an indication of the emergence of local forms of democratic politics? And is there any possible way of reconciling these re-invented, modernised traditions with western notions of procedural or substantive democracy?

# Methodology

To provide an answer to these questions, the paper employs two social science methodologies. The first approach, the dominant approach in the political sciences, is one that adopts a procedural and institutional definition of democracy. Some of these analyses attempt to, as far as possible, quantify data to ascertain law-like rules and patterns that govern political action and behavior. Whether quantitative or not, scholars in this tradition share the underlying assumption that 'democracy' is a concept of universal meaning and application. The concept 'democracy' is transhistorical, as the many attempts to link Athenian notions of direct democracy with the representative democracies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century illustrate. The concept 'democracy' is also transcultural, as shown by the endless attempts to illustrate that democracy is, in its essence, the same in Japan as it is in Jamaica even if there are institutional differences. These transhistorical and transcultural assumptions are then used to justify what amounts to an analytical trick in which the analyst uses the democracies of

EuroAmerica as an uncritical template in terms of which the newer democracies of the post-colony can be studied, classified and often found wanting.

The second approach rejects the premise that democracy means the same across time and space. The approach examines the conceptual difficulties associated with words such as 'democracy' and characterises democracy as a social imaginary that is in a process of evolution rather than only an institutional system with well defined rules, procedures, practices and institutions. Contrary to the first approach, it views democracy as a product of history and culture and inseparable from its context, particularly the international economy. To operationalise such an approach requires a close investigation of local political praxis as well as the influence of the global economy and local history on that praxis. Proponents of this approach argue that the methods of the first school are inappropriate for the study of the newer democracies as they ignore the historical and cultural differences between the western templates and their post-colonial counterparts. Moreover, the international context at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century imposes several limits and constraints upon post-colonial democracies, which have to be taken into account in a serious attempt to understand the dynamics of the formation of democracy in such post-colonial or post-apartheid contexts.

The two social science paradigms lead us to quite divergent responses and explanations. The first approach identifies a variation in the reach of social rights, in the words of Guillermo O'Donnell (1993), to suggest that there are areas in South Africa where democratic rights are not being respected despite a constitution and political system devoted to their implementation. Adam Przeworski and his co-authors (2000) would argue that the re-emergence of traditional leaders points to the lack of economic growth and development. They would interpret the re-emergence of traditional leadership not only as inherently incompatible with democracy but a worrisome indication of regression into local forms of dictatorship. William Munro's analysis of the politics of traditional leadership in KwaZulu-Natal certainly echoes these concerns (Monroe, 2001). My critique of the conventional literature on democracy will focus on Munro's contribution as it represents the mainstream approach to the study of democracy in the post-colony by those placed in the metropole.

The second approach illustrates how different political actors use the term 'democracy' to engage in a battle for political power and authority. This approach illustrates how the meaning of the term 'democracy' can be put to very

different uses and reveals the conceptual difficulties that arise when different definitions of what democracy means are at work in the same political space (Schaffer, 1998; Chatterjee, 2003; Wedeen, 2004). The approach examines the everyday political practices of South African citizens in those rural parts of the country and regions governed by traditional authorities to reveal the complex and hybrid nature of traditional leadership, its enormous variations across the region, its adaptability and malleability. It reveals how the lack of an active state leaves room for the re-invention of tradition and how the urban political elite might find this re-invention suitable to its own political agenda (Koelble and LiPuma, 2005). It also illuminates the way in which traditional leaders are forced by circumstance to adapt to a rapidly changing social, economic and cultural environment. All-the-while, they insist that they represent an eternal “African way of doing things” that is conceived of as an essential aspect of culture when it is anything but that.

## **Paper Structure and Research Objectives**

The first part of the paper examines the concept of traditional leadership and illustrates both its formal and informal resurgence. The second section critically examines the procedural and institutional approach to democracy favoured by the discipline of political science. The approach leads to the conclusion that traditional leadership and democratic governance are deeply incompatible concepts. The third section investigates how the term ‘democracy’ is put to different uses in the South African political environment. It investigates the various conceptualisations of democracy relevant to local political discourses and shows how these discourses shape and reshape the concept ‘democracy’. This section suggests that concepts are not imbued with a universal essence but are malleable and shift forms and shapes; i.e. they are context specific, culturally, linguistically and historically determined and therefore do not mean the same thing in different places. The last section illustrates the manner in which traditional leadership functions in various parts of South Africa. The intention here is to examine how some traditional leaders are attempting to ‘democratise’ their role and function in rural society while others wish to re-establish ‘commandment’ structures of authority and power that replicate colonial and apartheid experiences (Mbembe, 2000; Mandami, 1996).

The aim of this methodological journey is to illustrate that ‘democracy’ in the post-colony cannot be divorced from three fundamental factors:

1. The workings of the international economy that undermines the economic sovereignty of post-colonial states and forces such new democracies to, on the one hand, abandon functions always considered critical to the establishment and maintenance of the nation-state while, on the other hand, forcing the same state into functions and actions that are not associated with the western model of state-building or compatible with procedural and substantive notions of democracy;
2. The global discourse of what democracy means in terms of political practices, institutions, procedures and norms and its local circulation and permutations that develop into hybrid arrangements that may differ significantly from the original western model;
3. The underlying socio-structures left behind by the colonial/apartheid past that do not change as rapidly or as easily as the political system might such as deep-seated poverty, a culture of violence and retribution, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, lack of skills and a myriad of other socio-cultural dimensions.

Only if analysis grasps the interactions between the international economy, local culture and history will the theory of democracy be adequate to its object of study. Only if democracy is understood to be a social imaginary in motion and subject to negotiation rather than only a system of institutions and practices, will the analysis of democracy in post-colonial spaces be able to move forward from its current state. The efforts to establish 'democracy ratings' in the form of Freedom House charts or 'quality of democracy rankings' are at best misguided and at worst ideologically driven attempts to establish 'good' and 'bad' democracies. The argument I wish to make is not that institutions and procedures do not matter: they clearly do as so many political science works illustrate (Thelen, Steinmo and Longstreth, 1992). Rather, to ascertain why democracy in the post-colony appears to be taking a radically different turn compared to its western counterparts, an amended methodology is called for. The key point is that the local political culture, the international setting and history of the post-colony, in this case South Africa, must be factored into a comprehensive analysis of what democracy might mean, might be and currently is.

# The Resurgence of Traditional Leadership in the Rural Hinterlands of South Africa

In June 2003, Kaizer Chief Matanzima passed away at the ripe old age of 88. Matanzima had been the first premier of the Transkei, the first of the homelands fabricated by the apartheid regime in its aborted attempt to give substance to the doctrine of separate development. Matanzima went on to become a key ally of the apartheid regime in its effort to establish the Bantu Authorities and the various land consolidation and agricultural 'betterment' programmes that are today seen as a major cause of black impoverishment in the rural areas of South Africa. Matanzima did everything in his power to insure that the Transkei did not become a hotbed of political activity during his reign and had a hand in the silencing of numerous opponents to the regime. Moreover, his dealings with key industrialists and entrepreneurs, among them Sol Kerzner, the hotel magnate, earned him the reputation for being easily corruptible. In a one-line review, this was not a comrade in the struggle against apartheid. Quite the contrary: Matanzima was an important black collaborator in the establishment and functioning of apartheid and certainly one of its few black beneficiaries.

What is remarkable about the Kaizer's passing away is the politics of events that followed his demise. An appeal was made by Chief Mwelo Nonkonyana, ANC MP, member of the Eastern Cape House of Traditional Leaders and provincial chairperson of the Congress of Traditional Leaders (Contralesa), to the provincial government of the Eastern Cape to provide for a state funeral for the King of the Emigrant Thembu. The then premier of the province, Makhenkhezi Stofile, then requested that central government cover the cost for the funeral. There is no doubt that the Matanzima family, which includes several highly ranking members of the ANC including Patekile Holomisa, the current chairperson of Contralesa and Nelson Mandela, the former President, could afford to shoulder the costs of the funeral. The issue of the state burial came up as a result of Matanzima having been a monarch and 'head of state'. And while the status of the Transkei as an independent country was certainly not undisputed, he could qualify for a state funeral as a result of the royal position he had held for some forty years.

President Mbeki vetoed the granting of a state funeral. Yet, the Eastern Cape provincial government, itself in receivership as a result of the gross mismanagement of funds rooted in the malpractices of the Matanzima regime, took it upon itself to provide a portion of the funds for what became a rather lavish affair. But the really surprising development of the funeral was that

several eminent statesmen, who had fought against apartheid and everything Matanzima stood for, and who had been the architects of the new dispensation, hailed the Chief as if he had been a member of the liberation struggle. Overturning his own veto, President Mbeki appeared and praised the chief for his tireless efforts to provide a better life to his 'subjects'. No less a figure than Nelson Mandela provided a praise song for the man who had once offered to take him into 'protective care', noting that Mandela would then no longer serve as a threat to the apartheid regime. The aforementioned MP Nonkonyana even referred to the Chief as a 'liberator of black people' and a 'statesman among statesmen'. Given the role Matanzima had in providing some semblance of legitimacy to apartheid, these sentiments and statements were the reversal of the history unearthed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It represented the public redemption of a figure that once epitomised the many smaller acts of black self-betrayal that wounded the ANC and no doubt retarded the overthrow of apartheid. One observer, voicing the concerns of many, asked why the ANC had stooped to the 'sanctification of an evil man'. Why had it chosen to cauterise the wounds of the past through a publicly orchestrated act of forgetting?

The eulogising of the Chief is only a fractional part of a surprising story about the come-back the traditional authorities, so fundamental to the apartheid regime and the rural misfortunes of the majority of South African citizens, are making (Crais, 2002; Ntsebeza, 1999). In several parts of the country – mostly in the former Bantustans of Venda, Ciskei, Transkei, and Bophuthatswana but also in other parts of Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and KwaZulu-Natal provinces – the traditional leaders are back in the business of politics. Armed with the blessing of several pieces of local government legislation and in contradistinction to the professions of ANC politicians that the tribal authorities were to be a thing of the past, traditional leaders are re-inventing themselves and their institution.

There is a certain irony in the fact that the professed instrument for weakening the tribal authorities – the Municipal Structures Act of 1998 and the Municipal Systems Act of 1999 – have become instruments for the re-assertion of chiefly power. These acts were to reform local governance across the country by instituting elected government across the country. However, the number of municipalities was sharply reduced from 850 to 284 and since the scope of local governance in terms of territory to be covered (now local government covers those parts of the country formerly excluded under the Bantustan policy), the actual reach of local governance is limited (Ntsebeza, 1999; 2002; Claasens, 2001). In some cases, the size of the municipalities, as large as mid-sized European states, is such that it is difficult to establish meaningful

communication channels between councilors and the governed. Moreover, chiefs were provided with 20% of the seats in the municipal government as they are, according to the new local government legislation, to be consulted by the elected officials on matter pertaining to development. This form of representation goes far beyond the restricted and vague role given to tribal authorities in the Constitution.

In addition, there are several clauses in the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004 that provide for exceptions to general rules regarding land usage and ownership to accommodate areas under tribal or traditional authority. The legislation provides traditional leaders with the right to distribute communal lands and determine its usage (Ntsebeza, 2004). Most importantly, the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act of 2003, while bitterly criticised by the traditional leaders for being too limiting in its application, provides traditional authorities with a role in land administration, health and the administration of justice, economic development and arts and culture (Crais, 2004). It provides ‘traditional communities’ with limited forms of sovereignty and outlines the process for the reworking of traditional rule. And certainly the fact that in a country where the government is reluctant to implement a general HIV/AIDS medication strategy due to its costs, the willingness of the state to cough up 50 million Rand a month to support an institution long seen as an anachronism poses important questions.

An objection could be mounted that although there might appear to be an affirmation in some parts of South Africa of ‘traditional leadership’ structures, its nature is so varied across the country and so local and limited that it should not detract from the overall consolidation of democracy. Traditional leaders do not exist in urban spaces and there is no House of Traditional Leaders in three of the provinces of South Africa – the highly urbanised provinces of Gauteng and the Western Cape as well as the rural Northern Cape. Moreover, traditional leaders play an important role only in some enclaves across the country, mainly those areas which were former Bantustans and in which the apartheid regime had installed traditional leaders to do its bidding. And, indeed it is correct to observe that there is enormous variation across South Africa in terms of the authority traditional leaders can exert. Yet, the fact remains that at both the formal, institutional level and at the informal, everyday level, traditional leaders are re-asserting their power in such rural spaces.

As LiPuma and Koelble (2005) demonstrate, traditional leaders can do so partially because the state is unable to reach into these rural hinterlands. As one

of our interviewees wryly remarked, “when you talk to the chief, something will happen; when you talk to the council, you know nothing will happen”. The ‘failure’ of the state to bring effective local government to these rural hinterlands is part of a cascade of limits and constraints placed upon the South African state by its external environment. The South African government is highly dependent on the perceptions of the international financial markets (Abedian, 2004). The ten years since 1994 demonstrate that these markets are highly sensitive to any signal the ANC government might make that it is to veer of the course set by the “Washington Consensus”. The abrupt devaluation of the Rand, despite essentially positive ‘economic fundamentals’, in 1996, 1998 and 2001 illustrate how dependent the country is on positive sentiments in the derivatives and other international financial markets (Roux, 2004; Kantor, 2004).

The consequence of any policy decision that might indicate (or even hint) to these markets that the South African government might steer away from its conservative fiscal and monetary course (or merely the threat of it) is severe volatility in the exchange rate of the currency. As a result of these limits on liberation, the South African state has been unable to aggressively address the vast social and economic legacies of apartheid, particularly in the rural areas so willfully neglected and systematically destroyed by the colonial and apartheid regimes. The failure of the state to touch the lives of rural citizens and the concomitant failure of the democratically elected but ineffective local authorities has opened up several spaces for traditional leaders to re-affirm their cultural, social, economic and ultimately political power in all sorts of manners (Claasens, 2001). However, this failure by the state is complemented with a reformulation of what traditional leadership structures might look like and how they might be made more compatible with an indigenous version of local democracy that incorporates “African ways of doing things”.

Consider the wide variety of adaptations South Africa has so far witnessed from its traditional leaders. There are several instances across the country where traditional leaders have been placed on top of the party lists of the ANC and the IFP and garnered between 80 and 90% of the rural vote in their districts (Koelble, 2004). They now represent their communities in national or local parliament; some are cabinet, others provincial ministers. One might argue that such individuals have ‘integrated’ into the democratic politics of the new South Africa. Yet, the question must be: has the political party gained that many votes in an electoral district as a result of a ‘fair and free’ election in the EuroAmerican sense or is the election result an indication of a very different understanding of the electoral mechanism? It is, for instance, not uncommon in

wide parts of the Pacific, Asia and Africa to vote for a particular person or party as a consensus-building exercise rather than an expression of the aggregation of individual preferences (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997; Mbembe, 2000).

Electoral conflict is to be avoided as it can result in communal conflict and is therefore subject to negotiation prior to the election. And, there is anecdotal evidence that indeed these mechanisms are at work in several parts of South Africa. Another question must be whether the individual gained support as a result of his being a chief or as a result of his belonging to the appropriate party? Several studies in Southern Africa indicate that the chief can play an important role in mobilising and persuading citizens to vote for a particular party (Ntzebesa, 1999; Oomen and van Kessel, 1997). Of course, one could take the position that it scarcely matters whether chiefs are elected because of their social status or party affiliation, as long as they adhere to democratic principles on their way to the elected position. However, it is far from clear whether the mechanisms of choice, particularly in the rural areas of the country, conform to the ideology of the self-interested voter or the vote-maximising candidate so widespread in EuroAmerican political analysis.

There can be little doubt that some traditional leaders have opted for creative adaptations to the new political and economic system and its opportunities. There are several instances where traditional leaders have created community development trusts or trust funds to administer communal lands. In such cases, the community trust is usually associated with a communal land claim for the restitution of land appropriated by the apartheid or colonial regimes (Robins, 2003). In such cases, it is often the chief who is also the chief executive officer of the fund and his councilors constitute the board of directors (van Wyk, 2003). This strategy has raised some eyebrows since it is not at all clear that the CEO of the trust is any more accountable and that his actions are any more transparent to the community that supposedly benefits from such corporations than the shareholders of any corporation. Finally, and more on this topic in the last section of the paper, there are several instances where traditional leaders have reformulated the way in which village level decisions are taken to make the institution far more 'democratic' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997).

The above strategies of adaptation could be considered as creative, adaptive responses to the coming of a new dispensation. Other traditional leaders have taken openly hostile positions to the new regime, as for instance a group of Swazi chiefs in Mpumalanga province. Robert Thornton illustrates how these traditional leaders threatened the South African state with secession to

Swaziland, sanctified by a treaty between South Africa and Swaziland, as a means of putting pressure on the municipal and provincial authorities to bring development to their region (Thornton, 2002). Others have clearly not accepted that the democratic state requires of them to become 'ordinary citizens' rather than oligarchs in their community. Kaizer Chief Matanzima, for instance, insisted that those who wished to meet him in council did so as Transkei citizens, long after the coming of democracy and the dissolution of the Transkei as a homeland (Crais, 2004). These two cases illustrate that chiefs have not given up the hope of maintaining some form of 'limited sovereignty' vis-à-vis the South African nation-state. In some cases, they are not shy about expressing the desire for more than just limited sovereignty but are pushing for complete autonomy, as is the case of some of the KwaZulu-Natal chiefs in the IFP.

Even if chiefs are not making the case for complete autonomy and cultural separation, there are several studies that indicate the enormous 'informal' power chiefs can command in certain communities. Lungisile Ntsebeza and Anninka Claasens separately illustrate how difficult it is in rural communities for 'subjects' to object to the chief and his decisions (Ntsebeza, 1999; Claasens, 2001). To provide a delicate example, during an interview with a long-standing land rights activist, now Member of Parliament for the ANC, a powerful committee member and globally known and respected individual, the following situation emerged. This particular MP expressed the fear that upon returning home, the local chief, with whom the individual had several conflicts over land usage, land rights and gender rights, would take revenge. In this case, the chief had threatened the MP by calling the individual a 'witch' – a not inconsiderable threat given that the area has seen numerous witch-hunts and killings over the last two decades (Niehaus, 1999). Chiefs can wield enormous cultural and social power through their position as both communal leaders and spokespersons for the village council, consisting mainly of local elders. Often sanctioned by the resident traditional healers, the chief can take a central role in both the physical and the psychological realms of the community – a position that even a modern, powerful, and politically protected individual might find difficult to compete with.

Particularly women's rights advocates express the fear that should traditional authorities be given limited sovereignty over 'their communities', women's rights are likely to suffer. Women are often regarded as minors under customary law and do not, in many instances, have equal status to men (Claasens, 2001). The debate concerning women's rights took a sharp turn over the Communal Land Rights Bill in 2003. Deep divisions opened up within the ANC over the issue of whether the bill ought to recognise 'communities' as juridical persons

and whether land could be transferred to them. Lydia Kompe-Ngwenya, one of our interviewees, opposed such a provision arguing that the land rights of individual users must be recognised in and protected by the law. On the other hand, Patekile Holomisa, another one of our interviewees, argued that legal title to communal land should be vested in the traditional authorities. After much debate, the legislation passed Parliament without a satisfactory solution to the issue of women's rights to land.

On the one hand, traditional authorities were given the right to administer communal lands but the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act stipulates that traditional councils must contain 30% women in an effort to enforce women's rights at the local village council level. Moreover, powers were vested in the minister for land affairs to override local decisions, causing, in turn, traditional leaders to express their concerns about the further erosion of their powers. This was done in response to women's rights groups suggesting that women would and could be over-ruled at the local level and needed the protection of the state against the patriarchal powers of the elders and chief (Hassim, 2005). What should be clear is that traditional leaders have re-inserted themselves into the political discourse in South Africa in fundamental ways. To ignore the issues that arise from this re-insertion into the body politic is to imperil any comprehensive analysis of South African democracy (Crais, 2002; Koelble and LiPuma, 2004). I shall now turn to the two competing research paradigms to explain this resurgence and to examine their usefulness in the analysis of post-colonial democracy.

## **The Procedural and Institutional View of Democracy: On the Incompatibility of Traditional Leadership and Democracy**

Guillermo O'Donnell notes that the recent wave of newly emerging democracies across the globe have spawned polities that must be considered 'polyarchies' but which display 'systemic variations' in the social reach of democratic rights (O'Donnell, 1993). The term 'polyarchy' was coined by Robert Dahl to describe political systems that contained a 'procedural minimum' of contested and competitive elections for office, participation of the citizenry through some form of collective action, and accountable rulers subject to the rule of law (Dahl, 1971). O'Donnell suggests a colour-coding scheme in which 'blue regions' are

those in which the state and its institutions are present, highly visible and where the rule of law prevails.

Then there are 'green areas' where the state enjoys 'territorial penetration' but functionally is not highly visible. Lastly, there are the 'brown areas' where the state is neither functionally nor territorially present. In these brown areas, O'Donnell notes, the state's 'components of democratic legality, and hence, of publicness and citizenship, fade away at the frontiers of various regions and class, gender and ethnic relations' (O'Donnell, 1993: 1359-61). Here the state is characterised by 'low-intensity citizenship'. This characterisation surely describes the inability of the state to reach into the rural hinterlands and reflects a situation prevalent across the post-colony. Yet, it glosses over the immense difficulties in drawing boundaries between brown, green and blue zones as they exist within rather than next to each other. There are several powerful anthropological studies that suggest that even in densely populated urban areas, the reach of the post-colonial state is mediated through a variety of associations (Hansen, 2001; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; Chatterjee, 2004; Caldeira, 2000). The aims of these associations indicate the level to which citizens of post-colonial democracies have to rely upon their communities, rather than the state, for assistance. These associations include recycling projects, slum dweller associations, women's self-help groups, criminal gangs, savings communities, brick-making projects, committees dedicated to the establishment and maintenance of public toilets and the like (Appadurai, 2000). To attempt to draw a line between a 'blue', 'green' or 'brown' area, even in more affluent suburbs of cities such as Johannesburg or Cape Town is an impossible task as these imagined spaces are actually inseparable and mutually constitutive. In practice, the reach of the state is mediated, limited and often overwhelmed by community relationships.

Several 'new institutionalist' writers point out that the creation of new sets of institutions, procedures and rules are highly political acts. Such a process has taken place across the globe with the coming of democracy to large parts of the post-colony. The definition of what, for instance, the structure and shape of the governing institutions might be is guided by the interests of the parties negotiating the new dispensation (Thelen, Steinmo and Longstreth, 1993). Scott Mainwaring, among others, has illustrated how the design of electoral systems and institutions is shaped by the promotion of the various sets of interests the participants bring to the negotiations (Mainwaring, 1991; 1995). William Munro picks up on these arguments in his analysis of the role of the electoral system in KwaZulu-Natal (Munro, 2001). Munro demonstrates how traditional leaders in that province of South Africa, in concert with their primary political

ally, the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), shaped the electoral system to suit their own particular needs at the expense of the rights-bearing citizens of South Africa. He boldly states that politicians from the IFP ‘set out systematically to establish blue and brown areas of democratic expansion in order to secure their own political advantage’ (Munro, 2001: 296). This was done to ‘entrench differential citizenship rights and meanings of citizenship for rural and urban populations; cultural clientelism in rural areas was the price for democratic expansion in the urban areas’ (Munro, 2001: 296). To Munro, the logic of South African political development is clearly a struggle between the progressive forces of modernity and those that would like to defend non-democratic structures of power.

Munro’s emphasis on KwaZulu-Natal neglects the fact that a very similar story could be recounted for several other areas of South Africa in which the IFP played no electoral role whatsoever. Munro’s depiction of the IFP as the party of Zulu tradition, as the party of opposition to the democratic dispensation, fits with conventional views of South African politics. In this view, the African National Congress, and particularly the figure of Nelson Mandela, are representative of the western ideals of a movement and fighter for universal human rights, democracy and freedom. Yet, there are equally powerful tendencies inside the ANC that support the concept of traditional leadership as my opening vignette and the section on traditional leadership illustrates. And, certainly, Mandela himself is on record as a supporter of village level democracy in which the chief plays a decisive role (Nash, 2002; Mandela, 1976; 1996). In his autobiography, for instance, Mandela fondly recalls the way in which the chief in his district made decisions after much discussion and negotiation and the weighing of collective sentiments. In numerous other accounts, Mandela has made a case for an African version of democracy that takes into account traditional leadership structures and rebuilds shattered cultural pride by restoring some of Africa’s most important cultural values, such as expressed in the term ‘ubuntu’ or humanity, to its rightful place. One mechanism of doing so, in Mandela’s view, is to give pride of place to village level discussion and decision-making guided by the chief and his council. Mandela describes the proceedings at the Thembu Great Place at Mquekezeni from which he drew his account of the role of the democratic leader:

‘It was democracy in its purest form. There may have been a hierarchy of importance among the speakers, but everyone was heard; chief and subject; warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and labourer. People spoke without interruption, and the meetings lasted for many hours. The foundation of self-government

was that all men were free to voice their opinions and were equal in their value as citizens' (Mandela, 1994: 610).

Mandela goes on to discuss the role of the regent. The regent simply listens to the comments, no matter how critical they might be of his actions. Meetings would go on until some form of consensus emerged from the deliberations; meetings had to end in unanimity, or they would not end with a decision. As Mandela puts it:

'Democracy meant that all men were to be heard, and a decision was taken together as a people. Majority rule was a foreign notion. A minority was not to be crushed by a majority. Only at the end of the meeting, as the sun was setting, would the regent speak. His purpose was to sum up what had been said and form some consensus among the diverse opinions. But no conclusion was forced on people who disagreed. If no agreement could be reached, another meeting would be held' (Mandela, 1994: 610).

Munro's reading of the ANC-IFP clash is a complete misreading of the debate around traditional leadership structures as it derives from the conventional view that most political scientists take when they approach 'democracies of others'. On the 'right' side of the struggle are the champions of democracy, freedom and western modernity; on the other side, the champions of tradition, of anti-western modernity, and authoritarian rule. This characterisation is incorrect and simplistic. Not only is there sympathy for the institution of traditional leadership in the ruling party at the very highest echelons of decision-making, but a conscious effort is underway to integrate and re-articulate traditional leadership in a modernist fashion. That such a project is not without its critics should be clear; but it is not a project fostered only by the opponents of the new dispensation but by its very champions.

Munro employs a wider vision of democracy than most institutional and procedural analysts of democracy do. For him, the aim of a new democratic dispensation is not only the creation of institutions and rules, but also to develop 'social practices' in which civil society can define their interests and articulate them in and through a 'rich fabric of institutions and authorities' (O'Donnell, 1988). However, his analysis of the impact of electoral rules is myopic as it brackets out the possibility that there are forces inside the ANC that might harbour sympathies for the traditional leadership project. Moreover, he does not

entertain the notion that there are aspects of traditional leadership, which may, in fact, represent a different form of democratic interaction from the western model. He suggests that it is in the interests of those political forces associated with the 'ancien regime' to limit the introduction of democratic institutions and social practices as they undermine their bases of authority and therefore power. And, in that sense, the IFP and the ANC stand at opposite ends in both Munro's and the western imagination of the negotiation process that took place in South Africa concerning the new dispensation. Yet, the data Munro ignores points to much greater complexity than the straightforward contrast between forces of progress organised in the ANC and those that stand in its way, such as the IFP.

Munro wishes to distinguish between 'high' politics and 'deep' politics. At the 'high' end of politics stands the process of negotiation between the various parties and interest groups. Here the IFP, symbolised by its leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, called for a federal system of governance and executive power-sharing that would protect group rights in terms of ethnicity, language, tradition, and culture. Here, the IFP could draw upon domestic allies in terms of the white, soon-to-be opposition parties, and the business community (both domestic and international) who thought that a federal system would defuse any centralist tendencies the ANC might still harbour. Again, Munro's analysis completely ignores the existence of pro-federalist sentiments within the ANC that were fostered quite systematically by external influences. Social democratic allies from across Europe suggested to the ANC that a federal system might be a compromise that would stand the party in good stead. Legal and constitutional scholars from around the globe weighed into the debate to illustrate the advantages of such a system (Spitz and Chaskalson, 2000; Klug, 2000). Federalism was adopted in South Africa, not because the IFP boycotted the constitutional negotiations, but because the ANC leadership had become convinced that such a system would not stand in the way of the social and economic transformations it envisaged as necessary.

At the 'deep' end of politics, so Munro argues, the IFP "intensified its efforts to bolster the power and authority of rural chiefs" (Munro, 2001: 301). It characterised the chiefs as the 'core of the Zulu nation' and a culture of 'parallelism' encompassing "the best of Africa living side by side with the best of the West", as Buthelezi liked to put his case in many a speech (Munro, 2001: 301). Unfortunately, according to Munro, the efforts of the IFP had less to do with 'parallelism' and much to do with the disenfranchisement of a large swath of the rural population. What the electoral system in KwaZulu-Natal achieved was that the IFP chief – a non-elected one at that - remained the most direct representative of the rural population at the council level. What the new

dispensation has achieved in rural KwaZulu-Natal is the curtailment of the rural population's ability to achieve civic, social and political rights. Munro concludes:

'In effect, the local electoral system sharply delimits rural citizen's capacity to press for extended citizenship rights by constraining their associational autonomy in all three categories of citizenship rights. It offers them limited electoral rights that strengthen the party over the people; it subjects occupants of tribal lands to regulation by traditional authorities whose arbitrary powers challenge the rule of law; and it undermines the ability of rural communities to press for greater welfare provision. In short, the institutional structure promotes a kind of cultural clientelism' (Munro, 2001: 307).

The analysis completely ignores the fact that the electoral system of KwaZulu-Natal does not differ from any other part of the country. In other words, the ANC could have harboured similar sentiments, only the analysis provided by Munro suggests otherwise.

Munro ends his analysis with a consideration of how this situation might change for the better. He speculates that there are avenues in which rural citizens can press for their citizenship rights, but he also points to the difficulties of doing so. His analysis is quite pessimistic about the prospects of South African, and by extension other post-colonial environments where rural populations have been similarly limited in their access to citizenship rights. In his view, and here he overlaps with the mainstream literature on democratic consolidation and transformation, the democratic experiment in South Africa is a truncated one and partial at best. At worst, the existence of traditional leadership structures could preface a slide back into authoritarian and dictatorial models of governance. And in that sense, Munro echoes the concerns of the entire procedural and institutional school when they present their assessments of democracy's prospects in large parts of the post-colony. The analysis presupposes a linear model of progress towards a western society as well as politics and economic development.

# The ‘Scientific’ Study of Democracy: the Comparative and Statistical Methods

Painting on a much broader canvas but with a similar definition of democracy in mind, Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Cheibub and Fernando Limongi (2000) provide an assessment of the impact of regime type on economic performance. Using data drawn from over 140 countries, they suggest that there is a direct causal relationship between economic performance and democratic regimes. Democratic transformations can occur in all countries, but those that are economically better off are more likely to maintain democracy, whereas the poorer countries are more likely to abandon elections as a means of choosing governments. Countries that sustain electoral regimes are then, in turn, more likely to generate economic growth and as they generate wealth, they are more likely to retain democratic structures. Wealth helps to bring about a virtuous cycle in which greater wealth brings benefits to the nation and therefore stabilises the democratic experiment. Poverty, on the other hand, is likely to re-affirm authoritarian and other non-democratic structures and is conducive to dictatorship.

As in much of his previous work, Przeworski and his co-authors rely upon a ‘minimalist’ definition of democracy based on Schumpeter’s notion that democracy is about choice and about an electoral marketplace (Przeworski *et al.*, 2000: 14). Robert Dahl’s original summation, derived from Schumpeter’s conceptualisation, defined procedural democracy by focusing on the competition for and contestation of decision-making positions and government offices, and the participation and inclusion of all the citizenry who had reached their majority (Dahl, 1971). On this account, democracy exists when there are free and fair elections among competitive parties under conditions of political liberties, particularly freedoms of the mass media, expression and assembly. Methodologically, these attributes are then organised vertically into levels of abstraction, following the rules of formal logic. As Munck and Vermeulen (2002) observe: “attributes at the same level of abstraction should tap into mutually exclusive aspects of the attribute at the immediately superior level of abstraction; otherwise the analysis falls prey to the logical problem of redundancy” (2002: 13). This then allows for the transcultural and transhistorical equivalence of cross system measures and indicators of democratic governance, the leading and first example of which was presented by Przeworski himself in his classic analysis with Teune (Przeworski and Teune, 1970).

This minimalism is conducive to large-scale comparative work and a prerequisite for any kind of statistical analysis. As Arend Lijphart argued, the comparative method which focuses on a few cases is always suspect of having too few cases and too many explanatory variables. So, in order to reduce, even eliminate, this short-coming, it is always better, according to Lijphart and most other theorists of democracy, to use the statistical approach to discover general rules and patterns about regimes. In that sense, the minimalism adopted opens up the possibility of doing large  $n$  studies, but there are equally important short-comings to such a truncated view of what democracy is. The minimalist view brackets out of its account complicating factors, including the central issues of accountability, of political participation, of the international economy, the state of the state, its history and development, and of everyday politics in which all of these concepts are given meaning and substance. No doubt, Przeworski, Dahl, or Lijphart recognise that 'everyday political action' or democratic participation or the international economy or the trajectory of the state might be important aspects of political life. The decision to focus exclusively on procedures and institutions is based upon the belief that, in the interest of a solid scientific study of democracy, such factors are not essential. Studies of elections and institutions allow for the measurement of democracy by identifying rules, procedures, and institutions and making them quantifiable. However, the decision to overlook these aspects of democracy begs the question whether it is in fact acceptable to use the same criteria of comparison for the older, established democracies and for the newer post-colonial ones.

Przeworski and his co-authors do not, in any way, address the issue of traditional leadership structures in newly emerging democracies. However, their analysis could be used to analyse the re-emergence of traditional leadership structures in post-colonial democracies. The authors would agree that there is a fundamental incompatibility between the notion of elected representation and the notion of hereditary leadership. The appointment to political office must be, in this version of democratic theory, regulated through the electoral process, otherwise the basic principles of democratic accountability and representation are violated. In other words, there is a basic incompatibility between the claims by traditional leaders that they represent their communities by virtue of their inherited role in the community and modern democratic principles and practices. Moreover, their finding that poorer countries are more likely to slip back to some form of dictatorship is relevant in this context as the resurgence of traditional leadership structures appears to be taking place in the poorest of the regions and provinces of South Africa.

Their analysis might even suggest a bifurcation of the South African national space into two distinct spheres. First, a sphere of democratic institutions and actions (elections) in the more affluent, progressive and urban spaces and second, a less democratic sphere where traditional leaders and other non-elected power-holders operate. The existence of such structures would signal a warning that the South African democratic state is still not consolidated sufficiently and that a return to dictatorship is still a possibility. And, in this sense, the analysis of Przeworski *et al*, Munro and O'Donnell easily melt into one. They all presuppose a linear progressivity from dictatorship to democracy, from tradition to modernity. There is no room in this model for the actual condition of the post-colony, namely hybridity.

## **Words and Politics: the Meaning of Democracy in the Post-Colony**

As I have tried to illustrate, the meaning of the word 'democracy' in the above school of thought relates to the study of institutions and rules, of participation and contestation for office, of contested elections and the system that enables nation-states to hold fair and free elections. As Lisa Wedeen argues, this reduction is committed in order to facilitate the 'scientific study' of democracy and to establish scientific, statistical results (Wedeen, 2004). In contrast, there are those who will argue that democracy is more than elections, institutions and rules; there are those who, for instance, argue that democracy is also about 'social practices' and pre-dispositions to accept argumentation, disputes and their resolution. And then there are those who would argue that democracy is really more about the role of civil society and its ability to converse, to communicate, to reform social structures and habits (Habermas, 1989; Young, 2000). That democracy has a substantive aspect in terms of a variety of political goals such as equality, social justice, or equal opportunity. The arguments between those who view democracy in a narrow and technical sense and those who view it in a much wider, emancipatory and liberationist sense are well rehearsed and known (Shapiro, 1996; Shapiro and Hacker-Cordon, 1999 (a)(b)). This is not the space to repeat them. I will begin, instead, with a consideration of the meaning of democracy in a post-colonial state structure, a structure which is subject to external controls over its economy and a history that turns the evolution of the democratic state in EuroAmerica on its head.

When T. H. Marshall argued that the history of citizenship moved from the establishment of civic rights to political rights to social rights, he was both right and wrong (Marshall, 1949). He was right in capturing the chronology of the western state in which the provision of civic rights predated the extension of the franchise and then the creation of a social welfare state. He committed a category error, however, in his depiction of social rights as the highest form of citizenship rights. On the contrary, social rights became the means by which the democratic state based on equal citizenship rights could begin to discriminate between various ‘population groups’, between various sets of citizens. As Michel Foucault points out, the major characteristic of the current democratic regime of power is a ‘governmentalization of the state’. The regime gains legitimacy not through the participation of citizens in matters of state but through the claim that the state provides for the welfare of the population.

The basis of this claim is the redistribution of resources from one group to another, thereby splitting up the homogeneity of the citizenry. And this category error is most apparent in the formation of the colonial and post-colonial state. Colonial states were never based on the notion of citizenry or participating populations but populations to be administered. Citizens were not recognised; they were subjects that were supposed to listen to commands and fulfill what they were told to do (Mbembe, 2000). So, what distinguishes the colonial and post-colonial state from its western template is that the colonial state was already one of ‘governmentality’ that treated the population as groups to be administered rather than as rights-bearing citizens. As Partha Chatterjee puts it:

‘We have therefore two sets of conceptual connections. One is the line connecting civil society to the nation-state founded on popular sovereignty and granting citizens equal rights. The other is the line connecting populations to governmental agencies pursuing multiple policies of security and welfare. The first line points to a domain described in great detail in democratic theory in the last two centuries. Does the other line point to a different domain of politics? I believe it does. To distinguish it from the classic associational forms of civil society, I am calling it political society’ (Chatterjee, 2004: 37-38).

Chatterjee’s point, which is supported by the South African material, is that the development of the western state is the exact opposite of the evolution of the post-colonial state. The notion of civil society, so central to the conceptualisation of western democracy, is both demographically and geographically limited. In contrast to the efforts of the western state to bring

about homogeneity from diversity, to make citizens – preferably bourgeois ones - out of peasants, the colonial state intended to bring about heterogeneity, encouraged by the doctrine of ‘divide and rule’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; 1997). Even today, in the post-colony, large parts of the population are not rights-bearing citizens in the way they are envisaged in the western model of the democratic state (Mamdani, 1996). They are not part of civil society in the western sense of associations and the interaction between rights-bearing citizens and the state. Nor are they outside of the realm of politics or the reach of the state. Civil society, in places like India or South Africa, is restricted to a small section of the population that represents the ‘high ground of modernity’, as does the constitutional state (Chatterjee, 2004). But, in order to maintain its legitimacy, the state authorities have to confront a political society in which a myriad and ever-shifting set of groups can be mobilised for a vast variety of causes.

In South Africa, there are over 100,000 such organisations and groups ranging from slum dwellers associations, traditional healers and herbalists, HIV/AIDS sufferers, landless people’s movements, self-help organisations for the unemployed and many more (Robins, 2003; 2004; Habib, 2003). Although in much of the literature on civil society (see, for instance, Cohen and Arato, 1992), these organisations are characterised as comprising ‘civil society’, they are in fact a far cry from their western counterpart. It is in this collision between a mobilised political society and the modernist project that democracy might actually oppose the modernist project and bring into conflict the western notions of modern governance and the indigenous notions of what democracy ought to be about. For instance, in the case of fundamentalist Islamic groups forming political parties and winning political control over certain regions (as has happened in Nigeria) or even countries (the Sudan, Turkey, or Iran) and establishing Sharia laws. Militant Hindu political movement emerged in India to capture regional governments and heaved the Bharatiya Janata Party into national power (Hanson, 1999). In both cases, decidedly anti-western movements profit from democracy to establish legal and cultural systems that do not coincide with the western universalism of human rights and democratic equality. Yet, such movements will defend democracy as a political system as it has brought them to power and will question western interference as a form of imperialism. In other words, democracy and its use is contested terrain – it is not merely a static system of representation, elections, institutions and practices it is the ever-shifting enunciation of demands on the state made by a deprived citizenry struggling to survive.

My point here is that the ‘word’ democracy means quite different things to different groups of people, partially because of the history of the post-colony and partially because of the nature of post-colonial society. Moreover, the impact of the global conversation on what constitutes ‘good democracy’ or good governance plays out in the local discussion of what a good governmental system might look like. The consensus on the constitution, widely regarded as one of the most progressive and well-crafted constitutions globally, speaks to the cosmopolitan understanding of what democracy ought to be among South Africa’s political elite (Klug, 2000). This political elite understands that the creation of institutions is at the heart of the western understanding of what it means to introduce democracy.

Many citizens of South Africa, however, associate democracy with the abolition of inequalities, of greater access to resources, to equal opportunities, to decent housing, health care facilities and other services from which the majority of citizens had been deprived of (Mattes and Thiel, 1997). Of course, democracy may also mean a set of institution, but the majority of black South African citizens associates democracy with a change in their material conditions of life. And, who can blame them for holding these ideals a little more dearly than a set of western institutions and practices? After all, the democratic ‘revolution’ promised – above all – two changes. One was the introduction of a set of institutions that would replace those created under colonialism and apartheid designed to discriminate against the majority and second the introduction of policy to challenge the legacies of that past.

The South African material illustrates the interaction between a global dialogue as to what constitutes a good democratic regime and local conceptions of what a democracy should be. The South African constitution encapsulates these different tendencies (Klug, 2000). The document contains commitments to a set of institutions and practices based upon both European and US notions of the ideal democracy (checks and balances, the notion of power-sharing, judicial review, federalism, proportional representation). It also outlines a commitment to a broad range of social, political, and environmental rights (Spitz and Chaskalson, 2000). Yet, the implementation of such rights is proving to be much more difficult than the setting up of a set of institutions as the economy struggles to provide the resources necessary for any fundamental shift in social, cultural and economic power. The experience of the last ten years of democracy has been that the introduction of institutions reflecting the international consensus on what good democracy might be was the easy part. That was accomplished with the acceptance of the constitution and the adaptation of the political and administrative system.

What has been far more difficult to accomplish is the abolition of structural poverty, unemployment, lack of skills, ill health and deprivation (Daniel, Habib, and Southall, 2003). And it is in these arenas of policy that the vast majority of South Africans expect, at some point, to see advances. The striking indication one gleanes from the public opinion data is the immense amount of patience Africans are willing to extend to their political elite recognising that the economic and political reforms undertaken will take time to bear fruit (Afrobarometer, 2004). Moreover, there is a sophisticated recognition of the nature of the economic and political problems facing country and continent. It would appear that African voters are, in some cases, willing to extend a much longer period of time to their chosen governments than European or US voters are. This fact, in itself, speaks to a different sense of temporality among African voters. How long this remarkable patience will last is one of the imponderables of the democratisation project across the continent.

The second analytical point of the argument in this section was that democracy in South Africa is bound to take a different course from those in Europe or North America. The experience of the majority of the population with the state is fundamentally different from that of the EuroAmerican trajectory. In the post-colony, the state functioned on the basis of 'divide and rule', it did not create a sense of citizenship, belonging, trust or national community but indeed the opposite. There is only an embryonic 'civil society' that is busily mobilising a political society in all sorts of ways to participate in the struggle for scarce resources in an environment of joblessness, shrinking labor demand and low skills. As internal conditions for the consolidation of democracy are fundamentally different, so are the external conditions. The coming of post-colonial democracy coincides with attempts to bring about sentiment of solidarity, citizenship and national community that is absolutely necessary for the success of a democratic nation-building exercise. Yet, these efforts take place in a context in which the forces of international finance and capital are conspiring to undermine the economic sovereignty of the national state and especially its ability to establish control over its resources. Moreover, the population frequently experiences the coming of democracy not as liberation, as promised, but as continued poverty and displacement even if there are some attempts to bring about an improved quality of life on behalf of some governments. The inability of the state to bring about meaningful change in the everyday lives of their citizens is associated with the continuation of previous conditions and is often blamed on the minorities and social groups that had benefited from the previous regime (Chua, 2003).

# Democracy and the Politics of Traditional Leadership

During an intensive three-hour interview with several of the most influential traditional leaders at the House of Traditional Leaders in Bisho, Eastern Cape, the following exchange occurred. One of the traditional leaders, armed with a law degree from the University of the Transkei and, reputedly, a post-graduate degree from a prestigious British university, expounded on the democratic model that underlies the system of governance advocated by the traditional leaders in the Eastern Cape. His views illustrated vividly the type of thinking that appears to inspire the defense of traditional leadership for a large cohort of traditional leaders and spans across the political divide as we heard IFP and ANC-affiliated traditional leaders make similar kinds of arguments. The position is essentially that village democracy and traditional leadership is about involving the community in decision-making and that this kgotla system of consultation represents an African version of direct democracy.

In response to the Draft White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance issued by the Minister for Provincial and Local Government on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2002, the Eastern Cape traditional leaders had written an extensive comment. This comment took issue with a whole range of matters pertaining to the White Paper concerning the role of traditional leaders in South African society, their function under colonial and apartheid rule, and their prospective place in local governance matters. This comment argues that there are several meanings to the term democracy and that representative democracy, as adopted by the constitution and the government, could be substituted by a better form of democracy – namely direct democracy. The Comment on the Draft White Paper reads as follows:

‘The White Paper makes the consistent assumption that democracy has only one meaning, namely, that of representative democracy, in which people vote for representatives who then decide on all matters. However, direct democracy is a major alternative system, which was adopted most successfully in Switzerland. One of the main features of direct democracy is that the people decide on issues and can challenge any decision on any issue that is made by their elected governments. The traditional system of democracy is therefore similar to that practiced originally in Switzerland, before the introduction of the referendum, where decisions were made by the people gathered in the village square. The African tribal tradition requires decisions to be

made on a consensus basis by the people with the traditional leader acting as the facilitator of the discussions. The assumption made in the White Paper that traditional community decision-making processes are undemocratic and therefore unconstitutional is incorrect. This is a vitally important factor in the issue regarding governance of traditional communities' (The Coalition of Traditional Leaders, 2002: 4).

Obviously informed about the political science literature and the controversies surrounding the concept of consociational democracy, this particular traditional leader began to refer to Arend Lijphart's work and suggested that Lijphart's ideas concerning consociational democracy were in accordance with the traditional system of village decision-making in Africa. All the traditional leaders desired to do was, according to this spokesperson, to return to a system of consensus-building in their communities that echoed the politics of the pre-colonial period.

One possible response to such a characterisation is that Lijphart's work is being 'misused'. One might recall that the South African National Party developed the theme of consociational democracy when it unveiled its 1983 Constitution. The constitution called into existence three Houses of Parliament, one for whites, another for coloreds, and the third for Indians on the basis that this trifurcated system corresponded to the demands for representation for each of the South African major racial groups. The Nationalists argued that the system was in accordance with Lijphart's notions of consociationalism and attempted to market the system as a concession to liberal democracy in the West European sense. Never mind, of course, that the system also shifted power from the legislature to the executive and gave the President unprecedented decision-making powers. Moreover, the continued political exclusion of the country's black population was, of course, justified on the basis of their citizenship in the Bantustans. Since the Bantustans had their own administrative and representative structures – based on traditional leadership – the black majority would not require representation in the South African system of governance.

Yet, the interpretation of the traditional leaders of the concept of consociational democracy illustrates that western conceptions of political forms undergo a transformation when they travel across the globe to the post-colony and where they may acquire quite unpredictable/unlikely meanings. While there may be some superficial likeness between the cantonal system of village decision-making in Switzerland and the kgotla system of village consultation in wide

parts of Southern Africa, the differences are as striking as the similarities. The traditional leaders in Bisho are looking for a western justification for the system of governance that suits their interests and practices best and they appear to have found just such a justification in the democratic rhetoric of the Swiss cantonal system of deliberation. Without a great deal of knowledge about how that particular system (or rather systems) may have operated, its imaginary form – local-level, direct, participatory, consensus-based democracy – is taken as its essence and is then used to provide African village-level decision-making a western form or counterpart. It also serves as a welcome respite from charges that African politics is patriarchal and autocratic as the traditional leaders are at pains to point out that women are included in the deliberations and that decisions are taken not by the chief but by the community in consensus. In that sense, the rhetoric of participatory and direct democracy, of consensus-seeking democracy, exercised by the chiefs has both a local and a global moment.

Similarly, Lijphart's work clearly has global pretensions while being rooted in a local, western European discourse of democratic practice. Lijphart argues that consensus-oriented democratic systems are an alternative to the civil conflict plaguing much of the post-colony and many places besides. Consensus democracy, however imperfect it may appear to be from the point of view of participatory democracy, is better than no democracy at all. In comparison to the Westminster system of adversarial democracy, Lijphart insists, the consensus system is far better suited to the conditions of plural societies in which there is more potential for conflict between ethnic, religious, racial, linguistic, or interest groups. Irrespective of whether his position or that of his critics is correct or not, the fact is that the theory of consensus-seeking democracy is designed for global consumption. It sets out a blue-print for local democracy under the difficult conditions of plural societies prone to civil conflict across the globe. So, did the South African National Party or the traditional leaders get him wrong? Did they simply misunderstand the issues as Lijphart poses them and the solutions he offers them?

The answer to this question is both a yes and a no. Surely the argument Lijphart wishes to make regarding the Swiss system is one that stresses the participation of every individual citizen on the basis of equal political right (unlike the Swiss cantonal system prior to the introduction of the referendum that excluded women completely). He also places emphasis on the representative nature of the system in the sense that power-sharing takes place between the various political parties at the executive and legislative levels. His system of consociation is, above all, a system of representative democracy, not direct citizen-level participation. In fact, many aspects of the consensus system are in direct

contrast to ideas of direct democracy as the system's success depends on elite bargaining and reaching compromise decisions after negotiation and a great deal of log-rolling rather than some negotiated consensus among the citizenry. Both the original consociational and consensus-oriented democracies are both elitist systems rather than grassroots based political systems. So, at the level of 'understanding' Lijphart's model, there are several areas where the understanding of the National Party or the understanding of the traditional leaders in Bisho differs markedly from the intentions – both stated and unstated – in Lijphart's texts.

Yet, at another level, while there may be a misreading of Lijphart's intentions, there is, of course, an act of (re)interpretation unfolding that needs to be taken seriously. The fact is that much of the western discourse on democratic systems has no theory of reception, no notion of how what is written may be interpreted in rather different ways as the underlying ontology may differ fundamentally from that of the western academic. In the case of the apartheid regime, surely there may have been an act of 'conscious' mis-recognition of Lijphart's notions as there is a measure of conscious mis-recognition on part of the traditional leaders. The apartheid regime, just as contemporary traditional leaders, used the categories of Lijphart's work with a certain measure of tongue-in-cheek. But at another level their interpretation of the work on consensus democracy reflects the collision of local with global pretensions and the mixing of global democratic blue-prints with local prerogatives.

To provide a telling comparison, consider the court case brought by Julia Martinez against the Pueblo tribe for unequal treatment that Amy Gutmann refers to in her discussion of the relationship between democracy and identity. In this case, the Pueblo Indian community discriminated against the children of Pueblo women who had married outside of the tribe (in this case Martinez had married a Navajo) but not against the children of Pueblo men who had married outside of the tribe. The Pueblo community argued that deference to the group meant that the group could discriminate as to who had access to the resources of the tribe (land, hunting, fishing) and the right of residence, the vote in community affairs, and other rights accruing only to Pueblo Indians. The Supreme Court of the US found that the tribe indeed had 'limited sovereignty' over such matters and dismissed Martinez's case in 1968.

Gutmann interprets the Supreme Court decision as an unqualified disaster for women's rights in the US. Her view of the judicial decision is that it provides a traditional community with immunity to disregard the rights of the individual

person. She does not mince her words – to her the decision to grant limited sovereignty is a triumph of collective over individual rights and represents tyranny, not democracy. ‘Limited sovereignty’, to Gutmann, opens the doors to patriarchy, to dictatorial methods and the deprivation of human rights and dignity, even in the US. In this manner, the proceduralist and institutionalist view of Przeworski *et al* is mirrored and echoed by a political theorist who worries about substantive democracy and would otherwise reject the minimalist notion of democracy advocated by academics such as Przeworski. To Gutmann, the Supreme Court ruling represents a travesty of justice in the heartland of progressivity and modernity.

To a theorist from the post-colony, however, the cultural, historical and structural roots of the concept of ‘limited sovereignty’, even in the US, are all too familiar. From a post-colonial perspective, the establishment of the ‘Native Indian Reservation’ is nothing other than the establishment of Bantustans or homelands under the apartheid regime and the colonial strategy of isolating ‘surplus people’ in areas and regions of little use to the capitalist economy and of maximum political neglect. Brutalised communities of people were moved onto such reservations, with no regard for their origins, cultural traditions, or similarities and differences. The general history of subjugation of Native Americans differs little from those of other conquered or colonised peoples, with the possible exception that Native Americans had the misfortune of claiming land that now belongs to the sole superpower and are unlikely to win their campaign for restitution. However, when Gutmann claims that Pueblo society is ‘traditional’, she is committing an important factual and analytical error. Pueblo Indian society in 1968 is thoroughly modern; thoroughly hybrid; thoroughly enmeshed in and structured by the encounter with EuroAmerican modernity. In short, there is nothing traditional about the hierarchical structures Julia Martinez struggled against in her Supreme Court bid. Modern Pueblo society is a product of the encounter with EuroAmerican modernity and the structure imposed upon it by that encounter. It is not the product of a development willed by the Pueblo themselves, although it might be perpetuated by those who profit from its new set of rules. Similarly, the idea of establishing a kingdom of custom in South Africa is not a return to traditional, pre-colonial regimes. This form of governance has little to do with the past and much to do with present attempts to reshape the image of democracy into the vernacular.

There are several sites of struggle in the reconstitution of traditional leadership in South Africa. At one level, a group of hereditary leaders are attempting to modernise an institution that has roots in the pre-colonial period. In order to become the spokespeople for an, as yet, non-existent class of people, the rural

population of South Africa, these traditional leaders are busy ‘democratising’ their institution to make it compatible with the requirements of a modern, western democracy. In order to do so, they are drawing upon the legislation passed by the government to fulfill democratic norms and practices such as having women chiefs, female quotas in village councils, youth representatives in village deliberations and women elected into local councils. And in some regions of the country, such efforts at ‘modernisation’ of the institution are taken not only seriously but have brought about a very different form of traditional leadership. Certainly, Mandela’s vision of the consensus-seeking chief is one that could be turned into reality if there is sufficient oversight to ensure democratic accountability and transparency.

At another level, the capacity of the state to affect change in the rural areas, particularly the Bantustans of old, is limited. Some observers go as far as to say that in the Transkei ‘no institution has stepped in to replace traditional leaders’, characterizing the situation as one of ‘ungovernance’ (Crais, 2004: 19). The Transkei is by no means the only region of South Africa that must be characterised in such a manner. What government legislation in terms of the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act and the Communal Land Rights Act achieves is a reconstitution of culture and history that views the pre-colonial period as one of bounded absolute monarchies or previous sovereign states that lost their independence due to colonialism. It is a short step from such a historical and cultural melange of mis-representation to the admission that traditional leadership has an important role to play in the future political and cultural life of South Africa. While certain traditional leaders claim that their powers are being undermined by the legislation, the fact is that the legislation provides them with much greater powers than the original constitution and that it allows their direct involvement in political, administrative and developmental matters. In that sense, there must be a concern that clientelistic structures are being constructed that seriously question the democratic nature and accountability of rural local governance.

In other words, the door is wide open for several, quite contradictory developments to occur. On the one hand, it is entirely possible that an African version of local level democracy in which deliberations and consensus-building represents the central core of values develops. There are certainly forms of local level democracy in parts of Africa that replicate deliberative democracy and are in the best tradition of democratic justice. On the other, it is also a possibility that traditional leaders take the opportunity to establish what Gutmann refers to as ‘limited sovereignty tyranny’. The former outcome is possible only if the state takes responsibility for the oversight of local level institutions, allowing for

channels of complaint and adjudication. The later is probable if the state neglects its role and adopts the view that 'limited sovereignty' is a right not a privilege and thereby adopts practices not unlike those of its colonial and apartheid predecessors. Currently, the neo-liberal framework dictated to the post-colony in general points to the later outcome as being the more likely. It is also possible that several arrangements between these two polar opposites emerge.

Whatever the case might be, there is no doubt that in each case, its proponents will describe the situation as a form of 'democracy' and its critics will charge that it is not. In some cases, the critics may well be correct; in others they will not. Whatever the case might end up being, there should not be any doubt that the situation represents a hybrid between a variety of versions of modernity and tradition. These hybrids will vary according to the impact of the global economy and the shock-waves it sends through the culture of the locality. Add to this brew the impact of a colonial/apartheid history, characterised by extreme brutalisation, and the discourses of the present about appropriate forms of governance and behavior. The resulting mix is a cacophony of sounds and colors, diverse as the rainbow nation it supposedly represents, and united only by the space it occupies.

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The CSSR is an umbrella organisation comprising five units:

The Aids and Society Research Unit (ASRU) supports quantitative and qualitative research into the social and economic impact of the HIV pandemic in Southern Africa. Focus areas include: the economics of reducing mother to child transmission of HIV, the impact of HIV on firms and households; and psychological aspects of HIV infection and prevention. ASRU operates an outreach programme in Khayelitsha (the Memory Box Project) which provides training and counselling for HIV positive people

The Data First Resource Unit ('Data First') provides training and resources for research. Its main functions are: 1) to provide access to digital data resources and specialised published material; 2) to facilitate the collection, exchange and use of data sets on a collaborative basis; 3) to provide basic and advanced training in data analysis; 4) the ongoing development of a web site to disseminate data and research output.

The Democracy in Africa Research Unit (DARU) supports students and scholars who conduct systematic research in the following three areas: 1) public opinion and political culture in Africa and its role in democratisation and consolidation; 2) elections and voting in Africa; and 3) the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on democratisation in Southern Africa. DARU has developed close working relationships with projects such as the Afrobarometer (a cross national survey of public opinion in fifteen African countries), the Comparative National Elections Project, and the Health Economics and AIDS Research Unit at the University of Natal.

The Social Surveys Unit (SSU) promotes critical analysis of the methodology, ethics and results of South African social science research. One core activity is the Cape Area Panel Study of young adults in Cape Town. This study follows 4800 young people as they move from school into the labour market and adulthood. The SSU is also planning a survey for 2004 on aspects of social capital, crime, and attitudes toward inequality.

The Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) was established in 1975 as part of the School of Economics and joined the CSSR in 2002. SALDRU conducted the first national household survey in 1993 (the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development). More recently, SALDRU ran the Langeberg Integrated Family survey (1999) and the Khayelitsha/Mitchell's Plain Survey (2000). Current projects include research on public works programmes, poverty and inequality.

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