

Governance and Culture

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Good governance is inextricably linked to sustainable development, in the sense that neither can be achieved without the other. They are effectively "married" to each other and, like all marriages, when one partner defaults the other is adversely affected. Also, like all good marriages good governance and sustainable development have many things in common, not the least important of which is that neither can be successful if it is not firmly rooted in the culture of the country concerned. Another characteristic which good governance and sustainable development unfortunately have in common is that both have been pursued by applying blueprints, which were drawn up in the North on the basis of Northern values and Northern experience. It is not surprising, therefore, that the efforts of most countries of the South to achieve either goal have been a resounding failure.

Western civilization is the only civilization in world history to consider its values universal and universally applicable. It is also the only civilization whose members feel invested with a mission to spread or impose its values on the rest of the world. In that particular respect, the determining influence of the Christian church, Christian values, and the Christian worldview is undeniable. The term "orthodox", in classical Christian usage, refers to a set of religious doctrines which gained prominence in the 4th century. That term soon afterwards came to be used by certain Christian groups to differentiate themselves from "heretical" movements – that is to say, Christian movements whose members refused to subscribe to that particular set of doctrines. The tendency to consider "heretical" any departure from orthodox doctrine has persisted to this very day. The Catholic church, for example, considers most forms of Protestantism to be heresy, or at least in error, because they do not subscribe to certain of its own fundamental doctrines. Both the Western and the Eastern churches continued to consider themselves uniquely orthodox and catholic (universal) although, in the course of time, the Western church gradually identified itself more with the "catholic" label while the "orthodox" label became more associated with the Eastern church. The growing schism between the two churches was formalized in the year 1054. The line delimiting the areas on either side of that religious schism has become, with the sole exception of Greece, the present eastern boundary of the Western part of the North, which is now generally referred to as "the West".

In placing particular emphasis on the term "catholic", the Western church was underlining the universal character of its particular brand of orthodoxy, which it felt it had a divine mission to spread to the rest of the world. The urge to fulfil that mission in modern times dates from the 16th century when Christian missionaries first set out to convert the "heathen" of the world. The beneficiaries of such Christian action were given no choice in the matter. Those who manifested any reluctance to be so blessed were forcibly converted in the sincere conviction that their souls would thus be saved from eternal hellfire and damnation.

Georges Minois recounts how, in the 16th and 17th centuries, Spanish and Portugese missionaries inspired a terror of the Christian hell in Indians of Spanish Colonial America who had been converted to Christianity. The trauma which resulted from that well-intentioned missionary

action became an integral part of the psychological make-up of Mexican Indians, as was revealed in their psychotic hallucinations. The latter were traced to the terror inspired by the teachings of the missionaries that the Indians' ancestors were all burning in hell because they had not been baptised. Minois argues that the missionaries committed a “veritable spiritual genocide” in thus treating a people whose culture placed the greatest importance on ancestor worship. (*Histoire des Enfers*, 1991).

The attempts in more contemporary times to spread or impose Western values on the rest of the world resemble in many ways that earlier Christian enterprise. The role the church formerly played is now assumed by Northern governments, Northern regional authorities, and a number of international institutions headquartered in the North. Emissaries from those official bodies who, like their religious predecessors, have set out to convert the rest of the world to Western economic and political values, pursue their objective with similar missionary zeal and with the same unshaken conviction in the doctrines of their secular faith, which they apparently consider the only true path to economic and political salvation. Much like their religious predecessors, only a faithful application of orthodox doctrine is tolerated by those secular missionaries. Any subsequent deviation from accepted doctrine, on the part of those who agree to adopt the economic or political orthodoxy they preach, is regarded as heretical and, as such, to be firmly discouraged if not punished. All other faiths - schools of economic and political thought and their respective structural systems - are condemned as heresies.

Those countries in the South which persist in their heretical practices are considered to be condemning their peoples to a future of permanent underdevelopment and bad governance – the secular equivalent of eternal hellfire and damnation. In some extreme cases, such disapproval might take a more concrete form - ultimatums may be delivered, veiled threats may be made, development assistance may be reduced or withheld, trade benefits may be affected, banking guarantees may be withdrawn, and foreign investment may be diverted to more compliant countries. As often occurs with converts to a new religious faith, nationals of countries in the South who, having been converted to the new secular faith and adopted the prevailing orthodoxy--necessary credentials for gaining employment with international financial organizations and with those responsible for trade and development--tend to be the most fervent advocates of their new secular religion and its orthodox doctrines.

It is interesting to note that individual countries in the North do not feel under any obligation to adhere to the prevailing orthodoxy, although regional organizations of which they are members (e.g. the European Union) and international organizations which they dominate (e.g. IMF, the World Bank, and WTO) continue to subject countries of the South to that same orthodoxy. Thus, France refuses to apply to itself the economic liberalism the United States, Britain, and the international economic organizations both preach and practice. One sees a similar deviation from orthodoxy in matters of governance. The particular institutional applications of Western democracy which prevail in the North are urged, with increasing insistence, upon countries of the South as if they represented a single paradigm. But, as Esposito and Voll observes, “democracy” as a concept is capable of multiple interpretations and applications and, **“contrary to the belief of some of its more fervent advocates”**, the Western experience of democracy reveals **“a rich mosaic rather than a single paradigm.”** (John Esposito & John Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, 1996 p.193). That “rich mosaic” has resulted in there being no single form of democracy in the West. The democratic system in each Western/Northern country has developed institutional forms which reflect the country’s specific cultural features, its

social characteristics, and its historical experiences. No one could imagine that the American system of government would function effectively in either Britain or France, or that the political system of either of those two latter countries would be applicable in the United States, although the three countries belong to the same Western value system. Yet, despite the vast difference between the cultural values of the three countries and those of their respective former colonies, all three proposed and helped establish virtually exact replicas of their own systems of government in the latter countries.

Theodore Zeldin argues that French politics cannot be understood if the Anglo-Saxon model is used as a measure, and that it should not be assumed that because France has adopted a form of constitutional government which vaguely resembles that of Britain or the U.S.A., that French democracy is flawed because it has not evolved the two-party system needed to make it work along Anglo-Saxon lines. **“France has indeed borrowed ideas and labels from abroad but it has assimilated them very thoroughly into its own tradition, so that any resemblance to the original is largely nominal. Electoral practices and parliamentary usages in France have functions and a character which are substantially different from those in other countries.”** (*France 1848-1945*, vol.1, pp.365-366, 1973). Esposito and Voll point out that democracy is an essentially contested concept and that most people who advocate democratization in the current global context fail to recognize it as such. The authors claim that that is especially true of advocates of the particular forms of democracy to be found in Western Europe and the United States who, as a result, consider that people with different interpretations of democracy are “perverse” and that any efforts to create democracies in a different manner are false and undemocratic. Such fervent condemnation bears a suspicious resemblance to the vehemence with which “heresy” used to be condemned.

Discussing the folly of Africa's former colonizers in imposing on Africa their particular forms of democracy, Patrick Chabal comments pertinently: **“Democracy, as we understand it in its European context, is a form of political practice which evolved historically in specific settings under specific circumstances and at specific junctions in a limited number of countries.”** (*Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the Limits of Power*, p.5, 1986). The specific historical and cultural circumstances which had influenced the institutional forms of democracy that have developed in the West make it most difficult, if not impossible, for the latter to be utilized as *blueprints* for establishing sustainable democracy in countries of the South, with their different cultural values and traditions, their different social structures, and their different historical experiences.

It is difficult to transfer political ideas and concepts across cultural frontiers when even the language in which those ideas and concepts are framed cannot be translated into terms that would make sense to people in other cultural systems. Recalling the political slogan, The Four Freedoms - freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, freedom from fear - which were formulated by Roosevelt and Churchill during World War II to sum up their countries' war aims, Geoffrey Gorer observed that once that neat slogan was launched it was found that it could not be translated into any other language: **“In no language that I know of does a single word carry the two connotations of not-being-prevented-from and being-protected-from. All agree that Freedom is a good; but there are many differences as to how this good is rigidly defined.”** (*The Danger of Equality and Other Essays*, pp.55-56, London, 1966).

The culturally-determined worldview which inspires, influences, and informs Western political ideas, concepts, and constructs make the latter a highly misleading guide for comprehending the political relationships, the political structure, and the political dynamics of societies in the South. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, who undertook extensive studies of African traditional political systems, found Western political theory of no help at all to them in understanding how African politics function: **"We have not found that the theories of [Western] political philosophers have helped us to understand the societies we have studied and we consider them to be of little scientific value; for their conclusions are seldom formulated in terms of observed behaviour or capable of being tested by this criterion. Political philosophy has chiefly concerned itself with how men *ought* to live and what form of government they *ought* to have, rather than with what *are* their political habits and institutions.....We speak for all social anthropologists when we say that a scientific study of political institutions must be inductive and comparative and aim solely at establishing and explaining the uniformities found among them and their interdependencies with other features of social organizations"**. (M. Fortes & E.E. Evans-Pritchard, African Political Systems, pp.4-5, 1987 (emphasis in the original).

Democratic Traditions in the Caribbean's Ancestral Cultures

Western/Northern assumptions that democracy is a uniquely Western form of governance and that, consequently, any effort to establish democracy in the South must necessarily draw upon Northern experience and replicate Northern institutional democratic forms, wittingly or unwittingly ignore the historical evidence which invalidates those very assumptions. There is documentary evidence that democracy was independently invented in at least one region of the South - Ancient India. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya, founder of the Maurya Dynasty (322 B.C.-185 B.C) and ruler of the first Indian empire, wrote a detailed account of India, fragments of which have survived to the present time. In his account, Megasthenes mentioned the existence of Indian city-state republics of which he named several, describing them as "democratic".

The forms of "parliamentary" democracy that existed in several northern Indian republics between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C., detailed descriptions of which are recorded in extant ancient Buddhist texts, were more advanced than that practised by the contemporaneous Athenian democracy. What is even more striking is that Western parliamentary democracy did not achieve the level of sophistication of Ancient Indian parliamentary democracy until more than two thousand years later. The constitutions of those ancient republics were rooted in Indian culture in that they were all modelled on the constitution of the *Samgha* (the Buddhist Order) whose body of rules emphasized, *inter alia*, the sovereignty of the Assembly of all members, the importance of the assembly meeting frequently, and rule by majority.

The political affairs of the republic of the Sakayas of Kapilavatthu, situated on the border of Nepal and identified as present-day Tilaum-Kat, were conducted in assemblies which were open to all citizens, whatever their age or social status. Ramashankar Tripathi gives a detailed description of the

functioning of its parliamentary assembly, as recorded in contemporary Buddhist texts: "We learn that there were regular meetings with proper seating arrangements made by a special officer called *asanapannapaka* or *asanaprajnapaka*. Each meeting to be valid must have the requisite number of members present, but the chairman (*Vinayadhra*) was not counted for the purpose of the quorum. It was the duty of the whip (*Ganapuraka*) to complete the quorum by requisitioning the presence of members. The business began with the formal presentation (*sthanapanam*) of the motion (*natti* or *jnapti*), which was followed by a proclamation (*anussavanam*). Discussion related to the motion only, and all cantankerous or irrelevant talk was avoided and checked. A resolution (*pratijna*) received one reading (*jnapti-dvitiya-kamma*) and sometimes even three (*jnapti-catuttha-kamma*). Silence of the members on the resolution was regarded as assent, but in case of disagreement they had recourse to various devices, like referring the matter to a committee with a view to arriving at a unanimous decision. If no unanimity was possible, votes (*chanda*) were taken. Voting was by tickets (*salaka*), generally slips of wood, of various colours to indicate different views.....Voting was perfectly free and unfettered, and the majority view (*ye-bhuyya-sikam*) prevailed. A question once decided was not to be reopened.....The procedure was thus democratic, anticipating in many respects the working of popular assemblies. (*History of Ancient India*), pp.87-88, 1942). In addition to the democratic features described above, the parliamentary assembly of the Licchavis also provided for absentee voting. The above-mentioned parliamentary measures did not become standard practice in Western parliamentary democracies until the 18th century, at the very earliest.

India's ancient democratic values and its excellent democratic structures have survived, in one form or another, right down to the present time. The term *panchayat* (government by a body of competent men) came into general use in medieval times to designate the village executive. Village *panchayats* flourished up to the eighteenth century when they were divested of their powers by the British colonial administration, an action for which the colonial administration subsequently (its Decentralization Report of 1909) provided the following justification: "The re-establishment of village *panchayats* would serve as a vehicle for the emergence of an unorthodox system of village governments, not necessarily conducive to a wholesome growth of the British Empire." (Indira Rothermund, *The Aundh Experiment*, p.57, 1983). Until then, *panchayats* had possessed substantial administrative powers, India's central government having traditionally accorded them considerable scope for autonomous action. Alexis de Tocqueville considered the *panchayat* an ideal democratic model and he planned to devote a comprehensive study to it, similar to his **Democracy in America**, but had to abandon the project because of ill health. Authoritative voices have extolled the merits of panchayat village democracy in recent years. In its 2002 Human Development Report, UNDP suggested that India's *panchyati raj* (local government policy based on the traditional *panchyat*) is an excellent example of how decentralization can promote democracy at the local level. For his part, Amartya Sen affirmed that, in providing a relatively accessible means for the disadvantaged to participate in the larger democratic system, local democracy *panchyati raj* can be a potential stepping-stone towards other forms of democratic participation. (Jean Drèze & Amartya Sen, *Democratic Practice and Inequality in India*, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, July 2002).

Turning to another of the Caribbean's ancestral cultures, there is ample evidence that several traditional African societies possessed political systems with democratic features. Discussing West African states of the period between the 13th and 17th centuries, Basil Davidson observed that they

were more broadly democratic, in the representative and consultative sense of the word, than contemporary European states although they had not developed *parliamentary* forms of governance which resembled those of Western Europe. (Africa: History of a Continent, 1972). The *Gada* system of democracy, which was developed by the Oromo people in the northeastern part of Africa, first came to the notice of the West during the 16th century. Many Western travellers, diplomats, and social scientists who were able to study it at first hand in the 19th and early 20th centuries considered it uniquely democratic. An English visitor to Abyssinia in the 19th century actually declared the Gada system of democracy to be superior to *all* existing republican systems in the world. (W. Plowden, Travels in Abyssinia, 1868).

One of the major problems posed by the rapid increase in both the number and the intensity of sub-national conflicts in the South in recent times - conflicts that undermine the stability of, and threaten, the nascent democracies of the South - is the development of effective methods for preventing or resolving them. Classic conflict resolution methods and procedures, which were originally developed to deal with international conflicts, have proved to be of little value in resolving such conflicts. A number of pre-colonial African peoples had developed effective conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms and methods which succeeded admirably in that very respect. Among them were the Arusha of East Africa, whose conflict management system has attracted high praise from Western observers. Kenneth Carlston considers the Arusha conflict management process an ingenious, innovative, sophisticated system which is so extraordinarily effective that it merits being used as a model for dealing with national and international conflicts: **"They....developed the mediation process to a degree that capital and labor groups in national societies and states in international society might well envy and emulate today....The experience of the Arusha points to a possible new model of an international society of peace."** (Social Theory and African Tribal Organization: The Development of Socio-Legal Theory, pp.334-335, 1968.)

A honest, efficient public service is an absolutely indispensable requirement for democratic governance. On the basis of research he conducted on pre-colonial Dahomey, Karl Polanyi came to the following conclusion: **"The study of eighteenth-century Dahomey reveals that the gift of statesmanship is not a European privilege. There was a high level of statecraft in the early state. The social structure of the early state abounds in institutional devices that act as safeguards both to freedom and efficiency.....Arbitrary rule was barred through the formal separation of the central administration from activities originating in familial and local life, those cradles of tradition and freedom. Such jurisdictional limitations were reinforced by the administrative division of defense, trade, taxation, and currency domiciled in the palace, while local autonomy was rooted in primordial custom which the King himself did not dare to offend."** (Dahomey and the Slave Trade: An Analysis of an Archaic Economy, 1965, p.xxi).

Affirming that Dahomey's public administration attained excellence in respect of its honesty, its precision, and its reliability, Polyani recounts how Dahomey had drawn upon its traditional culture in choosing an original and unique method of state administration, which established **"institutional checks of a rare effectiveness."** The uniqueness of Dahomey's institutionalized checks and controls on administrative power lay in its dual structure and in the fact that they were designed in a manner that ensured genuine equality between the sexes. Every male official in the kingdom had a female

counterpart whose duty was to familiarize herself with the work of her male counterpart and to keep a close check on his administrative actions. The dual organizing principle was also applied to the army. Every soldier, from the highest ranking officer to the lowest rank, had a female counterpart based in the palace who performed a similar function. Despite the cumbersome bureaucratic structure which such a system implied, contemporary foreign observers all acknowledged Dahomey's outstanding efficiency in both civil and military affairs. Melville Herskovits estimated that Dahomey's standing army also included female soldiers whose number varied between 5,000 and 10,000. (Dahomey, An Ancient West African Kingdom, 1938).

Dahomey's unique system of public administration was both inspired and influenced by the country's traditional culture, of which duality was the most pervasive feature. An obsession with the perceived perfection of duality, which dates back to mythological times, resulted in the entire society being organized on the principle of duality. The ideal structure of every group in the divine world of the people of Dahomey was a set of twins of opposite sex, which was the inspiration for the system of pairing every male official with a female controller. Putting the sexes on an equal footing was not only far in advance of prevailing practice in other countries in the 18th century, but it also places 18th-century Dahomey well in advance of all countries in the 21st century, none of which has yet succeeded in ensuring genuine equality between the sexes in its public administration. Dahomey's unique administrative system survived right up to the beginning of the colonial period, for the English explorer, Richard Burton (1821-1890) was able to bear witness to it: "**Dahomean officials, male and female, high and low, are always in pairs.**" (A Mission to Glele, King of Dahome, vol.1, p.33, 1893). The first European colonial officials (all male, naturally) who came into contact with Dahomey's traditional system of public administration doubtlessly considered it contrary to nature and, consequently, had to be abolished to restore the natural order of things. After all, it was a period when eminent British doctors were still giving expert medical advice that the brains of girls were not capable of comprehending mathematics and that teaching the subject to them risked damaging their brains.

Traditional Culture and Modern Governance

From the early 20th century right down to the 1960s, there was virtual unanimity among Western *cognoscenti* that, because of its traditional culture and social structure, it would be impossible to establish parliamentary democracy in India. In a letter to John Morley, the Secretary of State for India, the British Viceroy in India, Lord Minto, asserted: "**Any electoral representation in India would be doomed to mischievous failure which aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement, regardless of the beliefs and traditions of the communities composing the population of this continent.**" Agreeing with Minto, Morley replied: "**I do not think it desirable or possible, or even conceivable, to adapt English institutions to the nations who inhabit India.**" Another Secretary of State for India, Lord Kimberley, declared that the notion of parliamentary representation in India "**is one of the wildest imaginations that ever entered the minds of men.**" (Myron Weiner, The Indian Paradox: Essays in Indian Politics, p.182, 1989 (Minto and Kimberley quotations)).

Those confident assertions were based on the fact that India's population comprised many different cultural groups and, particularly, on the pervasive nature of caste and its perceived

incompatibility with democratic governance. Instead of rejecting caste loyalties as being incompatible with democratic politics, India made them a key element in its post-independence democratic system. Caste is widely considered to have made an important contribution to the consolidation of Indian democracy by winning the adherence of the masses to democratic politics. Recognizing the central importance of caste in Indian society, Indian political parties integrated caste identities and structures at every political level, enabling caste associations to play a significant role. **"Perhaps the most significant aspect of the caste association in the contemporary era is its capacity to organize the politically illiterate mass electorate, thus making possible in some measure the realization of its aspirations and educating large sections of it in the methods and values of democracy."** (Lloyd & Susanne Rudolph, The Political Role of Indian Caste Associations, *Pacific Affairs*, March 1960.

There is no reason why Africa cannot do the same with tribe, which shares several of the fundamental characteristics of caste. Moreover, India's experience with caste suggests that the persistence of ethnicity in African political life is not necessarily an obstacle to democracy and that it may even be utilized to promote it. The similarity between caste and tribe in terms of the central importance they have in their respective societies, their ascriptive character, and the strong influence those two ethnic groupings exercise over their members, would also suggest that India's successful experience could provide valuable insights into how ethnicity might play a similar role in promoting democratic governance in Africa and, also, in improving its functioning in regions of their respective diasporas, such as the Caribbean.

Like India, instead of adopting the "ready-made" Western democratic model it was offered at independence, Mauritius devised a socio-political system that was "made to measure" for its multi-lingual and ethnically diverse society: **"The accomplishments of Mauritius since Independence are remarkable by any standard. In a world in which many developing countries have abandoned their commitment to democracy, faltered in their efforts to spur economic growth, or failed to keep democratic peace between diverse groups, Mauritius has an exceptional record. Elections are held regularly, and a vibrant multiparty system ensures that voters have some measure of choice."** (Lawrence W. Bowman, Mauritius: Democracy and Development in the Indian Ocean, p.163, 1991). Like Singapore also, Mauritius has an enviable record of economic development which has transformed it from the poor country it decidedly was at independence into an upper-middle-income economy. Mauritius is one of only three countries in Sub-Saharan Africa which the World Bank places in that income bracket. It is compelling evidence of the synergy that exists between good governance and successful development.

Recognizing the positive role which the country's religious and ethnic communities could play in consolidating democracy in a multi-ethnic society, Mauritius built its political system around those very communities instead of attempting to marginalize or exclude them as so many African countries have done. The country adopted a series of measures that made its ethnic communities not only feel that they had a stake in the country's democratic system but which also assured them that they would benefit equally from the political system. Those measures included constitutional recognition of the different ethnic communities, a "best loser" system which ensured that all ethnic groups would be represented in the parliament, a "civic network" that allowed the country's various communities, ethnic and non-ethnic, to participate fully in the policy-making process, and the inclusion of representatives

of all ethnic communities in every government formed: **"In Mauritius, the "best loser" system, the incorporation of groups based in every community into the policy-making process through the civic network, the achievement of a rough degree of representativeness among elected political leaders and senior public servants, and gestures like the extension of government support to cultural centres for the Creole and Muslim communities, all have contributed to the symbolic recognition that members of the minority communities have legitimate roles to play in the public life of the country."** (Barbara & Terrance Carroll, The Consolidation of Democracy in Mauritius, Democratization, Spring, 1999).

The Caribbean can draw very useful lessons from the experience of their two principal ancestral cultures on how to improve governance in individual countries of the region. One such lesson is the importance of political inclusiveness which, ideally, should complement economic/development inclusiveness. The social and political cost of excluding or marginalizing large sections of the population could prove very high indeed. The resultant sense of exclusion can kindle deep feelings of social hate in excluded groups which, in turn, can generate particularly destructive forms of violence. Moreover, such excluded groups are very vulnerable to manipulation by unscrupulous individuals and forces in the community who may not be averse to utilizing them to further their partisan agendas. Once the evil genie of social violence is released from the proverbial bottle, it is virtually impossible to put it back in again. That appears to have happened in Jamaica, which has since become one of the world's most violent countries. Jamaica's current Prime Minister, who on assuming office late last year stated that reducing the level of violence in the country was his government's highest priority, admitted in a BBC television interview last Tuesday (20 May) that the wave of violence that has engulfed the country in the past three decades was originally motivated and supported by political forces.

Caribbean countries would do well to rethink the winner-takes-all electoral system bequeathed to them by the colonial power. In its pristine form, that system is not at all suited to countries with large ethnically-different communities because electoral politics in such communities invariably tend to assume an ethnic character. In an inclusive, power-sharing system like that of Mauritius, which does indeed have a number of ethnic political parties, such a development can be a salutary one because it permits the more traditionally minded groups in the society to participate in modern democratic politics on terms that are culturally familiar to them. However, it can be a very dangerous development in a winner-takes-all system where a single political party, dominated by one ethnic group, may hold exclusive power for successive electoral cycles. That situation can generate a great deal of frustration on the part of social groups who find themselves excluded from political power for more or less long periods of time, which could adversely affect the country's political instability and possibly undermine its democratic system.

South Africa and India dealt with the problem posed by their culturally diverse societies differently from Mauritius. They both retained the winner-takes-all system electoral system but injected it with a heavy dose of added value. In India, that added value took the form of a system that subsequently came to be known as the "Congress System". The latter comprised a "catch-all", omnibus party (the Congress party) which covered the entire political spectrum in the country, embracing all social groups and political opinion to such an extent that all opposition forces could identify with one faction or another in the governing party and influence policy by joining forces with the party faction

concerned. Furthermore, the Congress party government always tried to reach a consensus with opposition political parties on important policy matters, thereby giving the latter a voice in policy formulation, which reduced any sense of exclusion they might have felt from not exercising power. South Africa also established a "catch-all", omnibus party (the ANC) which, like the Congress Party, embraced all social groups and covered the range of political opinion in the country. Unlike the Congress party, however, the ANC government includes, in the national cabinet, representatives of all political forces in the country who are willing to participate in government. It is a measure which effectively prevents feelings of political exclusion on the part of minority groups.

Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago might profitably emulate their two ancestral cultures by adjusting the political system they both inherited from Britain to make it more inclusive. Apart from the reduction of political tensions between the two main ethnic groups, which have been more acute in Guyana than in Trinidad and Tobago, the greater solidarity such action would engender could weld together the different social groups in each of the two countries into a genuinely national community which, like that of Singapore, would be willing and able to invest all its cultural energies into making the country's development an object of admiration by others. Other measures could be taken by Caribbean countries to adjust their political system in ways that would increase political participation and give people a feeling of greater involvement in the conduct of public affairs. The EPA issue revealed a great deficit in that very respect. Citizen initiatives similar to those California and a number of other American states have introduced, or the possibility of holding a referendum on a particular issue if a given number of citizens petition for it, as Switzerland allows, are among those that could be considered by Caribbean countries.

Finally, pre-colonial Dahomey's stunning achievement in establishing a public administration that was held to be the most efficient in the entire 18th-century world, and its precocious and highly successful experience of establishing genuine gender equality (if not female superiority in the sense that it was women who were the controllers in the public service and the army, not men) should be a source of both pride and inspiration to Caribbean peoples, many of whose forebears came from that very region. It would show Caribbean women, who still feel victimized because of their gender, not only what is achievable for them but also that it might even be achievable in partnership with Caribbean men, and not necessarily in conflictual opposition. It would also show Caribbean men that the grandeur of their male ancestors made it impossible for them to feel either diminished or threatened by their female compatriots enjoying genuine equality with them.