

# A Flawed Analysis: The Inadequacies of Western Liberal Democracy

## Mervyn Claxton

---

Few would disagree with the proposition that democracy is a politico-cultural construct. Nonetheless, with very few exceptions, the academic, political, and international organization establishments in the North (whatever the geographical origins of the individuals concerned) appear to reject any notion that the cultural quotient in "Western democracy" might disqualify it as a universally-valid instrument for promoting democratic governance in the Global South, particularly in countries that belong to other value systems. (In this article, the terms "Western", "North", and "South" are all employed in the geopolitical sense).

W. H. Auden once declared that *"the greatest threat to freedom is not dogmas but the reluctance to define them precisely, for in times of danger, if no one knows what is essential and unessential, the unessential is vested with religious importance....so the liberal who is so frightened by the idea of dogma that he blindly opposes any kind, instead of seeing that nothing is made an article of faith that need not be so, is promoting the very state of tyranny and witch-hunting that he desires to prevent."* (Review of T. S. Eliot's "Notes Towards the Definition of Culture", The New Yorker, 1948).

It is that reluctance, on the part of the proponents of Western liberal democracy, to define the "dogmas" associated with their theories which presents "the greatest threat to freedom" in today's world. "Instead of seeing that nothing is made an article of faith that need not be so", most particularly, the institutional forms of Western democracy which were developed in the North and are insistently urged upon countries in the South, "the liberal...is promoting the very state of tyranny....that he desires to prevent." It has produced in Africa, for example, what two French writers accurately called "Elected African Dictators". (Martine Renée Galloy and Marc-Eric Gruénais, *"Dictateurs Africains Sortis des Urnes"*, **Le Monde Diplomatique**, November 1997). It is the result of the failure of the proponents of Western liberal democracy to distinguish between "what is essential and unessential" in democratic governance.

Several African leaders have made clever use of Western democratic institutions and practices to get themselves regularly elected, "democratically", until the day they die. When international observers find no serious malpractices on election day, they often declare such elections to be "free" and "fair", wilfully ignoring the fact, as Galloy and Gruénais have convincingly demonstrated, that the malpractices which ensure such electoral "victories" had already taken place upstream of the elections - manipulation of the voter list, disqualification of political rivals etc. To call such countries "democracies" is almost an abuse of language. Nonetheless, by virtue of such elections, they would feature on the list of "Electoral Democracies" (116 in 2009) which Freedom House publishes every year.

That reluctance to define liberal democratic dogmas is reflected in Orlando Patterson's apparently unqualified acceptance of Freedom House's designation of "electoral democracies" and its conception of democracy, based *inter alia* on such value judgements as - "free", "partly free", "not free". (Jamaica's Bloody Democracy) <http://www.normangirvan.info/jamaicas-bloody-democracy-orlando-patterson/>. Consequently, Patterson's conclusions and much of his analysis are seriously flawed, particularly in respect of the links he sought to establish between democracy and violence, and between democracies and ethnic conflict. Patterson informs us that "*Jamaica's violence seems an anomaly. Democracy is held to be inherently prone to good order and peace...in domestic life they provide nonviolent means of settling differences*". He also shares with us with a conclusion to which he and a Harvard colleague came, concerning the relationship between violence and democracy, "*after examining the relationship between homicide rates and Freedom House's democracy rankings.*"

Patterson appears to give uncritical acceptance to Freedom House's conception of "democracy", of "freedom", of the relationship between both, and the validity of that conception in the various analyses, he cites, of the political dynamics in countries of the Global South. Discussing the link between violence and democracy in Jamaica, he observed that however great the violence during elections, Jamaica has achieved "*a robust democracy*", pointedly stating that "*Freedom House's has continuously categorized the island as a "free" country.*" Although Patterson hedged his use of the term "free" with quotation marks, that nuance is not reflected in his analysis.

Geoffrey Gorer graphically demonstrated how difficult it is to translate into other languages (and, by extension, into the political idiom of other cultures) even such a familiar political concept as "freedom". Recalling the political slogan The Four Freedoms - freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, freedom from fear, which Roosevelt and Churchill formulated during World War 11 to summarize their countries' war aims, 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", 1966).

Freedom House's definition of the "good" of "freedom" is both "rigid" and exclusively political - political rights (PR) and civil liberties (CL) - for each of which it gives separate country rankings. That exclusively political definition reflects the historical realities of the countries bordering the North Atlantic, whose Founding Revolutions - England's Glorious Revolution (1688), the French Revolution and the American Revolution - were all about political rights. The rigid definition of "freedom", which emerged from the particular experience of one geo-cultural area, is applied indiscriminately to the Global South by academic, political, and international organization establishments in the North, on the assumption that it represents a universal "good". In its 2010 rankings, for example, Jamaica is accorded a ranking of 2 for political rights and 3 for civil liberties, calculated on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 representing the highest value and 7 the lowest - scores that qualify Jamaica to be deemed "free".

However, the vast majority of countries in the Global South appear to define that precious "good" in very different terms, with social and economic rights trumping political rights. Patterson cited country examples from three regions - Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia - in support of his thesis. I shall cast my net just as widely in this commentary. Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 Guatemalan Nobel Peace Laureate, once rhetorically asked *"what kind of democracy is it that gives you the freedom to starve, to be homeless, and to lack medical care?"* Drawing attention, in her Nobel Prize acceptance address, to the fact that 84% of Guatemala's population is poor and 60% "very poor", Menchu declared: *"No less characteristic of a democracy is social justice. This demands a solution to the frightening statistics on infant mortality, of malnutrition, lack of education, analphabetism, wages insufficient to sustain life."* It is noteworthy that Menchu did **not** mention political rights once in her entire address, although Freedom House gave her country a very mediocre ranking of 4, in both political categories, in its 2010 rankings. Freedom House deemed Guatemala "partly free".

[http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW\\_2010\\_Tables\\_and\\_Graphs.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW_2010_Tables_and_Graphs.pdf)

Brazil, is accorded a ranking of 2 in both categories of Freedom House's 2010 rankings. Discussing the desperate situation of the majority of Brazil's population, a little over a half century ago, the French anthropologist, Claude Levy-Strauss, declared that democracy is meaningless to someone who does not know when he is going to eat his next meal. (*"Tristes Tropiques"*, 1955). The situation has improved somewhat since then but Brazil remains the Western Hemisphere's most inegalitarian society. Brazil's poor (the majority of the population) would hardly consider "the freedom to starve, to be homeless, and to lack medical care" to be a better "good" than political rights. Yet Brazil is deemed "free" by Freedom House, in its culturally blind application, to that country, of "Northern" political values. Unlike Brazilians, Cubans do not have "the freedom to starve, to be homeless, and to lack medical care", nonetheless, Freedom House deems Cuba "not free". If given the choice, it is more than likely that a starving, homeless, Brazilian who is in serious need of medical attention but cannot afford it, would choose to live in "not free" Cuba rather than in "free" Brazil. Moreover, "not free" Cuba has one of the lowest homicide rates in the world (6) and its gini coefficient (30) makes it more egalitarian than Europe taken as a whole. The average European gini coefficient is 30.7.

Liberal democracy and its theoretical formulations appear to have little meaning or attraction for the mass of the people in countries of the South, if they are not seen to produce a social or economic benefit for them. As R. S. Khare, the Indian anthropologist, has pointed out, *"When looked at from the ordinary Indian's point of view, democracy has to prove its bona fides in terms of a host of social criteria."* (*"Culture and Democracy: Anthropological Reflections on Modern India"*, 1985). In a context where the formal right to vote is seen as having no utility, its "democratic" value has no meaning. In a study of elections in Orissa (India), F. G. Bailey found that men were quite ready to sell their votes because they were poor and needed money. For them, elections were little more than an empty formality which could have no effect on their lives. *"Selling the vote seemed a legitimate business transaction, a way of putting the apparently useless to good use"*. (*"Politics and Social Change in Orissa"*, 1963).

For Africans also, the "good" of democracy is defined essentially in socio-economic terms. Claude Ake, the Nigerian political scientist, asserts that, in Africa, democracy is less about abstract political rights, such as *"the occasional opportunity to choose, affirm or dissent"* than about securing economic benefits. ("The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa", 2000). The place socio-economic rights occupies in their conception of democracy is reflected in a number of African constitutions that accord much greater importance to social and economic rights (e.g. the right to housing, medical care, social security, education etc.) than to classic democratic rights. See Mozambique's Constitution (Articles 26 & 27 of Part 11 "Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens" and Chapter 2 of South Africa's Constitution (Bill of Rights, Article 36). The section on political rights in South Africa's constitution is dwarfed in size by the sections on social and economic rights.

The contrast with the United States, where recent legislation providing increased social benefits to the population was hotly contested, cannot be more stark. Socio-economic rights find no place in America's revered constitution. Yet that country has largely succeeded in imposing its political values, and its conception of democracy and freedom(s), on the international governance agenda. The priorities in that alien agenda are one of the root causes of the violence which Patterson and so many others in the North perceive as being linked to democracy. It is not "democracy", as such, but rather the type of democracy that was developed by the countries bordering the North Atlantic, which they subsequently imposed on the South, that produces the social tensions which generate violence in so many countries of the South. In the latter countries, political regimes that fail to provide adequate, or at least minimal, socio-economic benefits to their populations tend to lose political legitimacy, whether or not they actually ensure classic political rights.

Zimbabwe's experience well illustrates the vital role which beneficial socio-economic policies play in legitimizing African political systems and regimes. Writing in 1988, the Zimbabwean political scientist, Masipula Sithole, estimated that the relative success of Mugabe's government in delivering *"the goods of development"* in health, education, agriculture and other areas had increased its legitimacy and, by extension, that of the country's democratic system. ("Zimbabwe: In Search of Stable Democracy", in L. Diamond *et al* (eds), Democracy in Developing Countries, Vol.2: Africa, 1988). The Mugabe regime's subsequent dramatic loss of legitimacy appears to be due less to its violation of the political rights of Zimbabweans than to the fact that its policies resulted in considerable impoverishment of Zimbabweans, the vast majority of whom found themselves unable to satisfy their most basic socio-economic needs. Arguably, if Mugabe's regime had continued to deliver "the goods of development", it would have retained the support of most of the black population even if it did circumscribe political rights in the way Cuba or Singapore have been accused of doing.

In contradiction to Patterson's thesis, violence in countries of the South appears to correlate more closely with the degree of socio-economic inequality to be found in the particular society than with its "democracy", as defined in terms of the classic political and civil rights, and reflected in Freedom House's democracy ratings. The Gini coefficient is a measure of income inequality in a society, which is expressed by a numerical value ranging between zero and one. Gini values are

generally multiplied by 100 in order to produce whole numbers - a value of 1 indicating absolute equality and 100 absolute inequality. Since the gini coefficient measures only income inequality, it should be read together with UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) in order to obtain a more complete picture of the level of socio-economic benefits a country's population enjoys. In this analysis, I shall exclude the international drug trade factor, which is undoubtedly a major source of violence in the LAC region.

A new Jamaican civil action group, Take Back Jamaica, whose members come from a broad cross-section of the population, link the high level of violence and crime in the country to socio-economic inequality and to the existing political system, rather than to "democracy", as such, which is Patterson's argument. Consequently, the group is demanding "*an overhaul of the nation's 48-year-old political system*". It declared that "*the society needed to be equitable for all and that education should be a must for everyone.*" The group has promised to produce a manifesto of its needs which it intends to present to the two major political parties. ('Take Back Jamaica' Makes Demands Of Country, 8 June, 2010). <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20100608/news/news1.html>

I shall correlate, with the Gini and HDI indexes, the violence in the countries cited by Patterson in support of his argument establishing a link between violence and democracy. I shall use the latest homicide rates per 100,000 people in each of those countries as a measure of the level of violence in the society, as indicated in this link:

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2009/oct/13/homicide-rates-country-murder-data>;

Where it is incomplete or dated, I complement that source with the following one:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries\\_by\\_intentional\\_homicide\\_rate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_intentional_homicide_rate)

The Gini coefficient is obtained from the following source:

[http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/eco\\_dis\\_of\\_fam\\_inc\\_gin\\_ind-distribution-family-income-gini-index](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/eco_dis_of_fam_inc_gin_ind-distribution-family-income-gini-index) That source, which does not contain the latest figures for some countries, is complemented by Wikipedia which has compiled figures from a number of official sources:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries\\_by\\_income\\_equality#cite\\_note-5](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_income_equality#cite_note-5)

The following is a listing of UNDP's HDI rankings: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

Those charts show that Jamaica has a very high homicide rate (58 per 100,000 population), which correlates with its low HDI ranking (100<sup>th</sup> of 182 countries in the world) and its high Gini coefficient (a value of 45.5), near the mid-point on the scale, which makes it the 40th most inegalitarian society in the world. Trinidad and Tobago has a very high homicide rate of 42.31 and a HDI ranking of 64. There is no recent gini coefficient value for T&T. Barbados, which has a low homicide rate of 15.1, ranks 37th in the world on the HDI scale. It is the only country in the entire Latin American and Caribbean region to appear in the "very high" HDI category. There is

no recent gini value for Barbados (the last one dates from 1992) but its very high HDI ranking correlates perfectly with the low homicide rate. Similarly, Jamaica's very high homicide rate, correlates with both its low HDI ranking and its high gini coefficient. Rigoberta Menchu has spoken movingly about the socio-economic conditions in Guatemala. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the level of violence in Guatemala, measured by the high homicide rate (45) correlates perfectly with its low HDI ranking (122) and its gini coefficient (55.1), making it the 11<sup>th</sup> most inegalitarian country in the world.

The homicide rates for South Africa, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, and Mexico are, respectively, 37, 30.8, 36, 52, 50.9 - ranging from high to very high, in the case of the last two countries. With a gini coefficient of 65, South Africa ranks as the world's second most inegalitarian society, placing 129<sup>th</sup> in the world on the HDI index. The gini coefficient for Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela makes them, respectively, the 9<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup> most inegalitarian societies in the world. They have respective HDI rankings of 75, 77, 58, and 53. In a 2008 paper prepared for OXFAM, Nathalie Beghin states that Brazil is one of the most unequal nations in the world, although it is one of the wealthiest, with the World Bank ranking Brazil's economy among the tenth richest in the world: *"[Brazil] has traditionally 'managed poverty' without making efforts to promote change in the socio-economic order....Accordingly, universal education and social security were not prioritised, and urban segregation, rural exclusion, and regressive taxation were reinforced."* ("Notes on Inequality and Poverty in Brazil: Current Situation and Challenges")

[http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/downloads/FP2P/FP2P\\_Brazil\\_Inequality\\_Poverty\\_BP\\_ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/downloads/FP2P/FP2P_Brazil_Inequality_Poverty_BP_ENGLISH.pdf)

Those comparative figures and rankings reveal a strong correlation between socio-economic inequality and violence (as measured by homicide rates) in democracies in the South. They are a sufficient explanation as to why Barbados is not "typical", as Patterson states. Indeed, Patterson put his finger on the real reasons for Barbados being atypical without, apparently, realizing it: *"Barbados....has a similar colonial past, and became independent just three years after Jamaica. Yet Barbados' per capita income is now more than twice that of Jamaica, its standard of living puts it among the developed world and Freedom House places it on a par with Western Europe in terms of the maturity of its democracy. Sure enough, Barbados also has one of the lowest homicide rates in the hemisphere."*

Barbados is atypical, but not unique in its non-violent transition to democracy. Mauritius, Singapore, and Japan also accomplished a peaceful democratic transition. Their respective homicide rates (2006) are 4; 0.38; and 0.44 - all far lower than that of Barbados. The economic success and overall level of development of both Singapore and Japan is the stuff of legend and, thus, need not be described here. Mauritius has an enviable record of economic development which, like Singapore, has transformed it from a very poor country with a very bleak economic future into an upper-middle-income economy. Mauritius has a gini coefficient of 39 (only 0.9 higher than Japan which is considered a very egalitarian society) and it is one of only three countries in Sub-Saharan Africa which the World Bank places in that particular income category. The other two are oil producing countries. Moreover, Freedom House not only deems Mauritius to

be "free" but also accords it higher rankings than it gave to "free" Jamaica. In the two categories, political rights and civil liberties, Jamaica is noted 2 and 3, respectively but Mauritius has earned a note of 1 and 2.

Apart from ensuring high or reasonably high levels of social development for their populations, Mauritius, Singapore, and Japan are, together with India, the only non-Western countries to have adapted Western democratic institutions to their socio-cultural specificities. That adaptation is arguably the real reason why all three countries have succeeded in their democratic transition (Freedom house deems Singapore only "partly free"), accompanied by a very low level of violence and a high level of development. By that same token, the failure of other democratizing countries in the South to adapt their borrowed or inherited Western political institutions to their respective socio-cultural values and conditions has led to the establishment of dysfunctional and unsustainable democracies. The failure to take that crucially important factor into consideration has, in my opinion, seriously flawed Patterson's analysis.

Patterson cited the lower level of street crime in China than in India, in support of his argument that *"domestically, democracies are in fact more prone to violence than authoritarian states, measured by incidence of civil wars, communal conflict and homicide."* China's homicide rate (2.2) is, indeed, lower than that of India (5.5) but not by much and there does appear to be a greater incidence of communal conflict in India than in China. In January 2008, the spokesman for China's Ministry of Public Security informed a news conference that although there had been a considerable reduction in serious crimes *"such as detonating explosions and homicides"*, the overall number of crimes committed had more than doubled since the 1990s. (Reuters, 30 January). The spokesman stated that theft, robbery and burglary accounted for the bulk of the crimes, adding that *"Street robbery and burglary have been top public safety concerns for many cities in recent years as breakneck economic growth brings a widening wealth gap."* Here again, we see the link between violence and socio-economic inequality, which appears to be further evidence not only that there is a stronger correlation between violence and socio-economic inequality than with either democracy or authoritarianism. That is, admittedly, only one example in respect of an authoritarian state but it does appear to weaken, rather than support Patterson's argument.

In stark contrast, a ready acceptance of socio-economic inequality appears to be an intrinsic element in liberal democratic thought and practice. With the violence that accompanied the French Revolution in mind, Alexis de Tocqueville attributed, to the Protestant religion, the relative lack of violence associated with political change in both America and England despite the vast differences in wealth in the latter country. *"If Catholicism predisposes the faithful to obedience, it certainly does not prepare them for inequality; but the contrary may be said of Protestantism, which generally tends to make men independent more than to render them equal."* (Democracy in America, Book 1, chapter 17). Ian Buruma observed that one can see why American evangelism was compatible with promoting capitalism: *"Perhaps it was because people were equal before God, or at least all white folks that they could live more easily with being unequal in this world."* ("Taming the Gods: Religion and Democracy on Three Continents", 2010).

Those two Protestant countries (America and England) have left an indelible stamp on the nature and the character of Western democracy but, like the Catholic faithful, populations in the South are not prepared to accept the socio-economic inequality that comes with it. Those countries in the South which were unfortunate to fall within the clutches of the IMF, or had to resort to World Bank loans, would easily recognize the Protestant stamp of inequality in Anglo-Saxon culture, in terms of the drastic budgetary reductions for social programmes and the removal of government subsidies for essential services that they were required to make.

Patterson argues that, as states with authoritarian regimes become more democratic, *"the mix of persisting authoritarian traditions and democratic freedoms can be lethal, sometimes resulting in complete state collapse, as in Yugoslavia."* Although his proposition can be supported to a large extent, the example Patterson cited has less to do with that country's democratic transition than with the attempt to fit the multi-national, multi-cultural state, which Yugoslavia had been under Tito, into the straightjacket of a nation-state - the highly centralized model of state formation for which Western democratic institutions were specifically designed. That model of state formation is most inappropriate for multi-cultural societies. It is another important reason why the standard formula of democratic governance - Western democratic institutions established within a nation-state - which governments in the North and the international community, alike, continue to urge with such insistence upon countries in the South. That standard formula has often been the cause of civil wars, communal conflict and high levels of social violence in their multi-cultural societies.

Because of the better framework it provides for peaceful multi-cultural co-existence, the multi-national state is a far more appropriate model of state formation for multicultural societies. The Ottoman Empire, which had ruled the constituent territories of Yugoslavia for centuries, did so within the framework of a multi-national state. The *"complete state collapse, as in Yugoslavia"*, to quote Patterson, which he attributes to that country's transition to democracy, should instead be put down to its adoption of the nation-state model. That complete collapse is eloquent testimony of the great danger that that particular model of state formation represents for all multi-cultural societies. Noel Malcolm, the British historian and author of *"Bosnia: A Short History"* (1994), has the following very pertinent comment on the Ottoman Empire's achievement:

*"Few empires in human history have been so richly assimilatory, so apt to absorb subjects from all parts of their domain into the ruling class. And few have been so tolerant of diversity, or so uninterested in remoulding the cultures of their subject peoples.....The multi-ethnic or the multi-religious patchworks which now pose such problems in so many ex-Ottoman areas (Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Southern Albania, Bessarabia, Abkhazia, The Lebanon) testify not to the weakness of the Ottoman system but to its greatest strength: the ability to accommodate different communities and different religions, allowing them to live their own lives, side by side."* ("Types of the Turk", **Times Literary Supplement**, 5 November 1993).

## Ethnicity and Violence

Patterson refers, with apparent approval, to the argument that democracies are particularly vulnerable to ethnic conflict, and to the temptation of leaders in "diverse" (multi-cultural) democracies to exploit ethnic identity for political ends, which is *"an all too frequent source of source of major conflict, sometimes culminating in oppression of minorities and even genocide."* Here again, Patterson fails to make a distinction between "democracy," in the sense of democratic governance, and the particular form(s) of democracy that are practised in countries which border the North Atlantic. Like the nation-state, the North Atlantic institutional model of democracy is particularly unsuited for multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies, precisely because they tend to produce the undesirable effects that Patterson enumerates.

Arthur Lewis made that very point, as far back as 1965, in a most emphatic manner. Declaring that much of Western political philosophy becomes irrelevant when applied to West Africa, Lewis emphasized the need for special democratic institutions which are adapted to the plural society. To drive the point home, he concluded that the surest way to kill the idea of democracy in a plural society was to adopt the electoral system of first-past-the-post. He insisted that societies with social cleavages required a system that *"will give minorities adequate representation, discourage parochialism, and force moderation on the political parties."* (Politics in West Africa, 1965). Lewis' observation concerning societies with social cleavages is, arguably, equally valid for Guyana and, perhaps, even for Trinidad and Tobago. Instead of the Western institutional form of democracy, Lewis proposed for Africa a form of democratic governance which would be based on power-sharing.

It was precisely because of the multi-cultural nature of their societies (multi-ethnic, plurilingual, multi-religious), that the vast majority of societies in pre-colonial Africa and Asia traditionally practised power-sharing and inclusive government. They rejected exclusive rule by any group in the society, which is exactly what the Western multi-party system, with its majority rule, produces. Such a system of governance was totally alien to African and Asian pre-colonial entities, for good reason.

As the French sociologist, Henri Mendras, pointedly observed, *"a system which permits half of the electorate plus one to govern the other half of the electorate minus one, with the consent of the latter, is one that no society and no civilization other than that of Western Europe and the United States has considered legitimate in the past two centuries"*. (*L'Europe des Européens: Sociologie de L'Europe Occidentale*, 1997). It is the widely perceived illegitimacy of that system of governance, on the part of those groups who lose winner-take-all elections, which provokes the violence of ethnic and other social groups that find themselves excluded from power, often for indefinite periods. Retributory or pre-emptive action on the part of those who win power in such elections is largely responsible for the *"oppression of minorities and even genocide"* that Patterson associates with *"diverse democracies."*

Furthermore, in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural democracies, the stakes are much too high for politics to be conducted on a winner-take-all basis. In Africa, political parties which win elections attempt to make their hold on power permanent and to ensure that other political parties never have a chance of gaining power. *"In Francophone Africa, each successful party set about creating structures and institutions that would make it virtually impossible for any other to come to power by legal means."* (Victor T. Le Vine, "The Fall and Rise of Constitutionalism in West Africa", **Journal of Modern African Studies**, Vol.35, No.2, 1997). Most African civil wars in the last four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been attributed to the winner-take-all system, which has permitted one ethnic group or a coalition of such groups to monopolize political power to the exclusion of all other groups. (Ibrahim Elbadawi & Nicholas Sambanis, "Why Are There So Many Civil Wars in Africa? Understanding and Preventing Violent Conflict", **Journal of African Economies**, Vol.9, No.3, 2000).

A little over a decade ago, Bruce Berman, the American political scientist, reiterated Arthur Lewis' dire warning, just as emphatically as Lewis did: *"Moreover, formal democratization in the form of parties and elections not only is compatible with continuing ethnic clientelism, but also often brings a destabilizing surge of ethnic claims and conflicts, suppressed by previous authoritarian regimes, that can discredit the process of liberalization itself and invite renewed authoritarian interventions."* (Bruce Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State", **African Affairs**, July 1998). That is exactly what has occurred in many African countries, over the past half-century, as a direct result of their adoption of Western democratic institutions without adapting them to their individual socio-cultural situation, as Mauritius has very wisely done.

Patterson cited Rwanda as an example of the vulnerability of democracy, in diverse societies, to ethnic conflict because of the temptation of leaders to exploit ethnic identity for political ends. That did occur all too often in post-independence Rwanda, resulting in the 1994 genocide. But ethnicity, in itself, does not necessarily render African democracies vulnerable to violent conflict. Although there was a certain degree of ethnic identification in pre-colonial Africa, a sense of ethnic identity that is sufficiently strong to generate violent ethnic conflict was not a cultural characteristic of pre-colonial Africa.

In Nigeria, the theatre of a major civil war fought largely along ethnic lines that was the death knell of the post-Independence democracy, the three broad cultural identities: pan-Ibo, pan-Hausa and pan-Yoruba, did not correspond to the colonial notion of static tribal identities. They expanded and contracted under changing conditions. Representing units of inclusivity as often as those of exclusivity, they embodied the notion of linguistic and cultural affinity rather than a rigid idea of shared descent. (J. A. Ajayi, "Historical Perspectives on Ethnicity and Nationalism in Nigeria", *Unesco General History of Africa*, Vol. VIII, 1993).

In pre-colonial Rwanda, *"hundreds of years of cohabitation and intermarriage had produced an 'integrated' social system wherein the categories of Hutu and Tutsi were largely occupationally*

*defined: whoever acquired a sizeable herd of cattle was called Tutsi"* (P. Uvin, "Development, Aid and Conflict: Reflections from the Case of Rwanda", 1996). If a Hutu acquired cattle he could become a Tutsi, and if a Tutsi lost his cattle wealth he became a Hutu. The division between the two increasingly became one of class rather than one of ethnic origin. The country's social and political structures maintained ethnic peace for centuries.

The notion of rigid, static ethnic identity is a consciously crafted ideological tradition that was introduced in the colonial era. (Leroy Vail (ed), "The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa", 1989). Applying the classic "divide and rule" principle, the Belgian colonial authorities not only insisted on demarcating the Tutsis and the Hutus ethnically, but also granted the former privileges, such as education and employment in the administration and the army, which were denied to the Hutus. They also required all Rwandans to carry ethnic identity cards. Such instant identification proved to be a horribly effective tool during the successive conflicts and massacres which began in 1959.

However, the legacy of bestowed privilege, on the one hand, and that of hate and resentment, on the other, did not necessarily make violent ethnic conflict inevitable in independent Rwanda. It was the Western multiparty system, with its majority rule and winner-take-all features that made such violent conflict inevitable. Where society is not structured along class lines and, in the absence of any political ideologies, which is the case in Africa, the ethnic group automatically becomes the most coherent and cohesive interest group in the society, which makes it an ideal base for forming a political party. Hence political parties in Africa tend to be structured around ethnic groups. Moreover, in Africa, where winners of elections not only get to have the whole political cake for themselves but the entire economic pie as well, political competition becomes, almost literally, a life or death matter for such politico-ethnic groups.

The social construction of ethnicity had internal and external dimensions, which John Lonsdale has labelled "moral ethnicity" and "political tribalism", respectively." Political tribalism was a response to the deliberate promotion of ethnic rivalry by colonial authorities. In the post-colonial era, political tribalism is driven by elite interests, Lonsdale argues. Discussing the notion of African "moral ethnicity", Lonsdale argued that moral ethnic norms underpin and regulate African civil society and that Africans have traditionally employed such norms in dealing with issues of civic rights and duties. *"Each ethnic group possesses a gamut of renewable traditions which codifies the rules governing relations with persons external to the group."* (*"Ethnicité, Morale et Tribalisme Politique"*, **Politique Africaine**, No.61, March 1996).

Reciprocal obligation, another central norm of moral ethnicity, is a norm of political accountability that applies within a given ethnic community and which is used, particularly, by the poor and the weak to invoke the responsibility of the rich and the powerful. *"It is also a vision of good citizenship and the public good. By placing the community's interests at the apex of the moral order, it provides a norm on which formal or informal groups can rely to maintain autonomy from the national state."* (Stephen Orvis, "Civil Society in Africa or African Civil Society?", **Journal of**

**Asian and African Studies**, Vol.36, No. 1, 2001). Moral ethnicity is thus seen as a positive traditional force which could help normalize inter-group relationships in African countries. Although moral ethnicity is not an institutionalized force, Lonsdale suggests that the fact that it is an *indigenous* one could make it a more powerful check on the abuse of power (and thus a more effective guarantee of political accountability) than any measure proposed by Western political theory.

Jacqueline Klopp has used the case of the Nandi nationalist movement to demonstrate how an ostensibly "ethnic" resistance movement, in Kenya's current politics of fragmentation and violence, can lead to a more tolerant and cosmopolitan politics. ("Can Moral Ethnicity Trump Political Tribalism? The Struggle for Land and Nation in Kenya", **African Studies**, Vol.61, No. 2, 2002).

Ken Saro-Wiwa, the executed leader of the Ogoni people (Nigeria), has given a graphic illustration of moral ethnicity - traditional values of honesty and probity that prevail within an African community, which do not generally extend to transactions with the institutions or structures of the modern state. He pointed out that where a Nigerian leader can embezzle millions in the distant capital and even be acclaimed for it by his own community, he would not dare touch a cent of the treasury of his own village administration. That tradition of public morality is rooted in the nature of the relationship Nigerians entertain with their traditional institutions and, more particularly, in the fact that the institutions embody values that are meaningful to ordinary Nigerians, values in which they firmly believe and, consequently, uphold. ("Similia: Essays on Anomic Nigeria", 1991).

That very rigorous African tradition of morality cannot be transferred to modern state institutions, with the objective of making political actors in the modern state accountable. The modern institutions of the African state in Africa are based on an alien system of values - that of the Western state. The solution would appear to lie in a policy of integrating traditional African institutions with those of the modern state and of adapting the functioning of the latter to accommodate the values of moral ethnicity. That is what Mauritius has done, with such spectacular success. The country has a robust democracy, scoring top marks in both categories of Freedom House's ratings. It has a very low level of violence and a vibrant, successful economy.

Mauritius adapted the Western political system, together with its component institutions, to the socio-cultural situation in its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. Politics is organized on an ethnic basis. Political parties identify with specific ethnic groups but political competition is conducted on an ethnic basis, openly and in a perfectly healthy way that prevents such competition from degenerating into ethnic conflict. Mauritius also adopted a series of measures which made its ethnic communities not only feel that they had a stake in the country's democratic system but which also assured each community that it benefitted equally from the political system. Those measures included constitutional recognition of the country's 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.

Far from being inimical to democratic governance, Mauritius' ethnically-driven political system has actually reinforced the democratic process in the country and contributed greatly to the country's successful democracy. (Henry Srebrnik, "Can an Ethnically-based Civil Society Succeed? The Case of Mauritius", **Journal of Contemporary African Studies**, vol.18, No.1, 2000). In India, caste identities present an obstacle of similar magnitude, to the proper functioning of Western political institutions. Like Mauritius, multi-cultural India succeeded in building a robust democracy because it adapted Western institutions to its socio-cultural situation in a way that helped bridge the country's deep social divisions. Like Mauritius did with its ethnic groups, India not only gave constitutional recognition to caste communities but also reserved special legislative seats for Scheduled Castes ("untouchables") in its constitution.

Instead of rejecting ethnic loyalties as being inimical to democratic politics, India made them a key element in its political system. 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 I. Rudolph & Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, "The Political Role of Indian Caste Associations", **Pacific Affairs**, Vol.33, No.1, March 1960).

The active involvement of disadvantaged caste groups in the democratic process helped to entrench democratic practices in Indian society. *"As the marginal social groups discovered the negotiable value of the vote during the early years after independence, they became avid players in the political arena at the local and regional levels."* (Subrata Kumar Mitra & Mike Enskat, "Parties and the People: India's Changing Party System and the Resilience of Democracy", **Democratization**, Vol.6, No.1, 1999). In some ways, Indian caste groups also became a bulwark against Hindu religious nationalism. Using their newly acquired political clout to great effect, lower-caste groups compelled the BJP (the Hindu National Party) to abandon some of its more divisive policies as a condition for their participation in BJP-led coalition governments in 1998 and 1999. Lower-caste political groups have not only established a secure place for themselves in India's democracy but have also become so important politically that it is unlikely that any national government could be formed without their active support. (Ashutosh Varshney, "Is India Becoming More Democratic?" **Journal of Asian Studies**, Vol.59, No.1, 2000).

A Plea for the development of new democratic institutions which would be more capable of addressing problems of governance in the Caribbean and the Global South

The political concepts and constructs of modern Western political theory were elaborated over the past three centuries in order to reflect, and to make sense of, actual political experiences, political realities, and existing socio-cultural conditions in Western countries. Those philosophical concepts and constructs are too specific - culturally, politically, and historically - to European and North American realities to have any validity at all for societies with different realities and experiences, different socio-cultural values and traditions, and a different political trajectory. That proposition is equally true for the democratic institutions that Europe and North America developed on the basis of those theoretical concepts and constructs.

Modern Western political theory is largely inspired by Ancient Greek political thought but however abstract Greek political theory might appear, like modern Western thought, it was forged on the anvil of experience. Discussing the penchant of Ancient Greek philosophers for abstract political theory, G. E. R. Lloyd, the Cambridge historian of Ancient Greek thought, found, from his study of the different constitutions of Ancient Greek democracies, that Greek political theory was rooted in the direct political experience of those democracies. *"Greek theoretical inquiry into the classification of constitutions seems clearly linked to the actual experience of that variety of constitutional types....."* (Demystifying Mentalities, 1990).

The assumed universal applicability of Western political concepts and democratic institutions has been challenged in every non-Western region in the world. I shall begin with our own LAC region. Octavio Paz has pointed out that the liberal democratic constitutions which all Latin American countries adopted after independence corresponded to European and North American realities but **not** to Latin American realities, and that far from promoting democratic government they actually hindered it:

*"In Europe and the United States these principles corresponded to historical reality, for they were an expression of the rise of the bourgeoisie, a consequence of the Industrial Revolution and the destruction of the old regime. In Spanish America they merely served as modern trappings for the survival of the colonial system. This liberal, democratic ideology, far from expressing our concrete historical situation, disguised it, and the political lie established itself almost constitutionally. The moral damage it has caused is incalculable; it has affected profound areas of our existence. We move about in this lie with complete naturalness. For over a hundred years we have suffered from regimes that have been at the service of feudal oligarchies but have utilized the language of freedom. Hence the struggle against the official lie must be the first step in any serious attempt at reform."* (The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico 1967).

Let's consider Africa. Two distinguished Western scholars, who had conducted extensive studies of traditional African political systems, found that Western political science was no help at all to

them in understanding political behaviour in African societies:

*"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." (E. E. Evans-Pritchard & M. Fortes (eds) African Political Systems, 1940).*

Almost sixty years later, two French political scientists, Patrick Chabal & Jean-Pascal Daloz, have come to exactly the same conclusion arrived at by Evans-Pritchard and Fortes. On the basis of their own research in the region, they concluded that the profoundly communitarian nature of political participation in Africa invalidates most Western analyses of African political systems, especially where they concern the legitimacy of political power. They suggest that such flawed Western analyses result from an imperfect understanding of the fundamental importance of community in African politics. They denounced the stubborn insistence, by national and international authorities in the North, that African political régimes can acquire political legitimacy only through multi-party elections, and that such elections are a *sine qua non* for good governance in the region: *"In our opinion, it is most unlikely that multi-party elections would promote a Western form of democracy, in Africa."* (Patrick Chabal & Jean-Pascal Daloz, *"L'Afrique Est Partie! Du Désordre Comme Instrument Politique"*, 1999).

Berman (1998) expressed the very same view in almost exactly the same terms:

*"Ethnicity, particularly the continuing and even increasing salience of communal solidarities in African politics, cannot be adequately understood by theories preoccupied with the reproduction of the modernist paradigms of state and society, with what Africa is not, rather than with explaining what it is. Liberal modernization theory, recycled within the anti-statist orthodoxies of the World Bank and IMF, is preoccupied with the reproduction of uncritical and idealized models of liberal democracy, the market and civil society"...political scientists preoccupied with the process of 'democratization' in Africa, remains marked by a teleological bias that clouds the understanding of historical change."*

Let's consider Asia. Masao Maruyama, the noted Japanese political scientist, contend that Japanese political dynamics and realities cannot be understood in terms of the principles of Western political theory. Arguing that several centuries of historical development in European politics underpin the conclusions in Western political thought, Maruyama asserted that **there is not a single proposition of Western political thought which had not been shaped by**

**Western historical experiences.** *"If one unravels these propositions or categories, it will be found that they embody the very political reality through which Europe has lived."* He declared that much of Japanese political science is irrelevant, precisely because it is dissociated from Japanese reality and also because of the tendency of Japanese scholars *"to chase after passing themes and methods developed in the European academic world"*, instead of basing their studies on problems drawn from Japanese experience. (*"Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics"*, 1963). I venture to suggest that the very same criticism can be made about the work of many political scientists in, or from, the South.

If the basic principles and concepts of Western democratic theory are inadequate for comprehending or explaining political dynamics in countries situated outside the North Atlantic zone, the political institutions and structures that were developed on the basis of those principles and concepts can not possibly be an effective means of promoting democratic governance elsewhere in the world. Yet, that is exactly what national authorities in the North and major international organizations, such as the World Bank and the United Nations, stubbornly continue to insist upon. That such an irrational policy has acquired intellectual support from all but a very few academics in the North and also, alas, from many in the South is most disturbing.

Maryuma has correctly pointed out, in my opinion, that "there is not a single proposition of Western political thought which had not been shaped by Western historical experiences", yet, for some unfathomable reason, that litmus test of historical experiences, which should be a determining factor in assessing democratic governance, is never ever applied to the experiences of countries outside the North Atlantic zone. If a government or a major commercial enterprise were to pursue, for more than a year or two, policies which not only produced the very opposite results that were promised to the electorate or the shareholders but also made the situation much worse rather than better, the government or the management concerned would be forced to resign. Governance policies, which are based on the propositions of Western thought, have been pursued in Africa for the past fifty years, with disastrous consequences. Notwithstanding, such unfortunate "historical experiences" those very same policies continue to be urged upon African countries, with recalcitrant countries suffering punishment in the form of denial of loans, Aid (however dubious a benefit that might be), or debt forgiveness, from the IMF, the World Bank, and powerful governments in the North.

Mauritius has accomplished a spectacular achievement, to its great credit. The country has succeeded in establishing a vibrant economy and a robust democracy with low levels of violence, which has earned top marks from Freedom House in the two categories for which it gives ratings - political rights and civil liberties: *"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 Bowman, *"Mauritius: Democracy and Development in the Indian Ocean"*, 1991).

The achievement in overcoming the formidable obstacles of deep ethnic, religious, and language divisions which have proven so fatal for other African "democracies" should have made Mauritius a text book case study of how a country with a deeply-divided society could successfully establish a robust democracy that meets all the criteria of liberal Western democracy. But that has not happened. Mauritius' stunning achievement is cited by only a few political scientists. The World Bank, the UN, the US State Department, the European Union, and individual European government never (to my knowledge) cite Mauritius as a model of governance for Africa. Its achievement also appears to be ignored by the vast majority of academic political scientists, both in the North and in the South.

Mauritius' great fault (in the eyes of the North) is that its achievement is based on a different model of institutional democracy from that proposed by Western political theory and, also, from that which Northern authorities advocate to countries in the South with such great insistence.

### What Lessons for the Caribbean?

Esposito and Voll, two American academics, have observed and that most people who advocate democratization in the current global context fail to recognize that the prevailing dominant concept of democracy is a contested one. They claim that this is especially true of advocates of the styles of democracy to be found in Western Europe and the United States who, as a result, "*view people with different interpretations of democracy as 'perverse' and any efforts to create democracies in a different manner as false and undemocratic*". (John L Esposito, & John O Voll, "Islam and Democracy", 1996).

That might be a charitable explanation why the United States apparently considers the Cuban model of governance "perverse" and why that model has been so hotly contested that it led the US to back (and perhaps even plan) the invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles which ended in the Bay of Pigs fiasco. It may also be the reason why the US was so hostile to Maurice Bishop's government in Grenada. The summary execution of Bishop and some of his colleagues was the official reason given for America's invasion of the island, but that coup d'état was only an excuse. The Reagan administration had been searching for an excuse to topple Bishop's government long before that.

There is an urgent need for a different form of governance in several Caricom countries, where the unadapted Westminster model of parliamentary government is unsuited to the socio-cultural situation of individual Caricom countries. This is most evident in countries like Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago where ethnic divisions have been exploited by politicians for political reasons. But a change in the prevailing model of governance is also necessary in other Caricom countries, such as Jamaica and Haiti. The recent events surrounding the Dudas case have

underlined the urgent need for a change in Jamaica's current form of governance. It is most heartening to see a number of civil society groups in the country clamouring publicly for such change. Civil society groups in Caricom are normally much too quiescent. Their general passivity has allowed the government in certain Caricom countries to get away with actions that would have been swiftly sanctioned in societies with more vigilant, activist civil society groups.

Mention was made above of the demand by a newly established Jamaican civil action group for *"an overhaul of the nation's 48-year-old political system"*. On June 5, a coalition of fourteen civil society groups in Jamaica issued a statement announcing their intention to work together to achieve *"non-partisan civic participation in the affairs of the nation"*, affirming their *"commitment to a governance process that broadens and increases public participation in, and oversight of the national decision-making process."* The coalition pledged to hold Jamaican political leaders to account.

<http://www.normangirvan.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/joint-statement-from-civil-society-groups-june-4-2010-12.pdf>

While welcoming that initiative, Norman Girvan regretted that two issues were not mentioned in the coalition's statement which, he felt, need to be addressed. The first was the need for a genuinely independent enquiry into the operation by the security forces at Tivoli Gardens. The second was *"the need for massive and effective social interventions in Jamaica's inner cities and depressed communities island-wide; in order to address the conditions under which thousands of citizens have turned to criminal activity as sources of livelihood and to criminal gangs for the provision of welfare services and security."*

<http://www.normangirvan.info/girvan-jamaicas-governance-crisis/>

Two essential changes in the mode, style, and objectives of governance, not only in Jamaica, but also in Caricom as a whole, emerge from the above statement and comment. One is the need for broader public participation in governance and decision making. The other is the need for a more egalitarian society in socio-economic terms. Caricom countries can no longer consider that democratic governance is attained by merely obtaining good marks in Freedom House's ratings. We have seen the correlation between the high level of violence in Jamaica and its gini and HDI ratings. We have also seen the correlation between the low level of violence in Barbados and its HDI rating. Those are the criteria (the non-political "freedoms") which need to be taken into account in assessing the quality of governance in Caricom, not the criteria on which Patterson based his analysis.

Norman Girvan's emphasis on the *"the need for massive and effective social interventions in Jamaica's inner cities and depressed communities"* concords fully with Rigoberta Menchu's statement in her Nobel Prize acceptance address that *"No less characteristic of a democracy is social justice"*. We need a more inclusive, more compassionate, more consensual, people-

centered form of governance that puts people first and which consigns, to the backburner, purely theoretical political rights which are indifferent to the human condition.

In that particular respect Caricom can draw on similar traditions in at least two of our ancestral cultures - Africa and India. We have seen above that social justice, in the form of socio-economic benefits which make society less inegalitarian, trump purely abstract political rights for Africans and Indians. Like Africa and India, political ideology plays little or no importance in Caricom countries, which reduces the scope for political conflict. Like Africa (but, alas, unlike India), there are no inherited differences of class (as is the case in Europe), which further reduces the scope for political conflict. We have less reason, therefore, for the kind of bitter political rivalry that so often mars politics in some Caricom countries. Ethnicity can be marginalized as a source of conflict by the introduction of power-sharing, which both Mauritius and Switzerzlerland practice so successfully.

The populations of Caricom countries are too small for us to afford the confrontational politics that hinder us from drawing upon the full range of talents in the society to solve the serious economic, social, and environmental problems that all Caricom countries currently face, to varying degrees. The multi-party coalition which recently formed the government in Trinidad and Tobago is a step in the right direction. Not only would power-sharing promote governance that is more consensual (in keeping with the traditions of our African and Indian ancestral cultures) but it would also be the logical extension of "*public participation in, and oversight of the national decision-making process*" for which the fourteen-organization coalition in Jamaica has justifiably called.

Other ancestral African and Indian traditions, which Caricom countries could, and should, draw upon in their efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of governance in the region are the qualities of compromise, forgiveness, conciliation, and reconciliation, whose great effectiveness in healing deep social wounds was strikingly illustrated by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Guyana, Haiti, and Jamaica are but three of several Cariocm countries whose societies could benefit greatly from the re-activation of such ancestral qualities.

Finally, Caricom can draw upon the deeply-entrenched traditions of village democracy which flourished in Africa and India in pre-colonial times and which still exist in both regions, albeit with greatly reduced power and importance. Alexis de Tocqueville considered the *panchayat* (Indian village democracy) an ideal democratic model and he had planned to devote a comprehensive study to it, similar to his "Democracy in America", but had to abandon the project because of ill health. (Guy Sorman, "La Nouvelle Richesse des Nations", 1987). In its 2002 Human Development Report, UNDP suggested that India's *panchyati raj* (local government policy based on the traditional *panchayat*) 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).

We should not hesitate to change our current model of governance to one that is better suited to our socio-cultural situation, for fear that any deviation from classic Western models might be denounced in the North as being "perverse", "false" or "undemocratic".

*June 12, 2010*