Session 8: Diverse Histories: Democratizing the Study of Democracy
INTRODUCTION

→ multiple, non-liberal ideas and practices of democracy

C.B. Macpherson
THE REAL WORLD OF DEMOCRACY IN US ANTHROPOLOGY

→ Aihwa Ong: “advanced liberal democracy, parliamentary democracy, electoral democracy, socialist democracy” (Ong quoted in Paley, 2002, p. 471)
→ “dictatorship”; “transition to democracy”

THE GLOBAL PROBLEMS OF “DEMOCRACY”
(1) A politically-motivated narrowing of meaning
(2) Mass media under-education
(3) Cultural Evolutionism (Eurocentrism)
(4) The Plural Society Problem

SOME OF THE PARTICULAR QUESTIONS OF “DEMOCRACY”
→ What does “democracy” mean, and should it ever be understood in the singular?
→ What types of different democracies exist, and why do they exist?
→ Is democracy about means (procedures), or about ends (outcomes)?
→ Why be democratic?
PARTIES: GATEKEEPERS TO POLITICS

→ Henry Maine, Max Weber: corporate groups
   → one body
   → ruled by a maximum leader
   → staff
   → does things in common
   → owns property
   → rules of membership

→ political parties and private corporations as parallel forms

→ restricted access

→ bureaucracies
→ the economy to politics
→ the politics of business
“The Green Book’s central tenet is that ordinary citizens can directly manage the bureaucratic and administrative institutions that shape their lives, and devise their own solutions to their economic and social problems. Hence, the Green Book contains the essential idea of statelessness, and of people managing their own affairs without state institutions. There is, as well, an emphasis on consultation and equality, and an explicitly voiced aversion to hierarchy and to the handing over of authority to state functionaries. There is, finally, a repeated insistence on ‘direct democracy’ through which citizens will take control of the state”.
From THE GREEN BOOK:

→ The instrument of government is the prime political problem confronting human communities (p. 7)
→ Political struggle that results in the victory of a candidate with, for example, 51 per cent of the votes leads to a dictatorial governing body in the guise of a false democracy, since 49 per cent of the electorate is ruled by an instrument of government they did not vote for, but which has been imposed upon them. Such is dictatorship (pp. 7-8)
when votes are distributed among several candidates, though one polls more than any other, the sum of the votes received by those who received fewer votes might well constitute an overwhelming majority. However, the candidate with fewer votes wins and his success is regarded as legitimate and democratic! In actual fact, dictatorship is established under the cover of false democracy (p. 8)
The mere existence of a parliament means the absence of the people. True democracy exists only through the direct participation of the people, and not through the activity of their representatives (p. 9)
people are seduced into standing in long, apathetic, silent queues to cast their ballots in the same way that they throw waste paper into dustbins (pp. 10-11)
since the system of elected parliaments is based on propaganda to win votes, it is a demagogic system in the real sense of the word (p. 11)

The party is the rule of a part over the whole (p. 13)

A society governed by one party is similar to one which is governed by one tribe or one sect (p. 16)

If a class, a party, a tribe, or a sect dominates a society, then the dominant system becomes a dictatorship. However, a class or a tribal coalition is preferable to a party coalition since societies originally consisted of tribal communities. One seldom finds a group of people who do not belong to a tribe, and all people belong to a specific class (p. 17)
A party that is formed in the name of a class inevitably becomes a substitute for that class and continues in the process of spontaneous transformation until it becomes hostile to the class that it replaces (p. 18)

Plebiscites are a fraud against democracy. Those who vote “yes” or “no” do not, in fact, express their free will but, rather, are silenced by the modern conception of democracy as they are not allowed to say more than “yes” or “no” (p. 21)

The press is a means of expression for society: it is not a means of expression for private individuals or corporate bodies. Therefore, logically and democratically, it should not belong to either one of them (p. 35)

Direct democracy: Basic Popular Congresses → People’s Committees → General People’s Congress

Religion → real law
In summary, the era of the masses, which follows the age of the republics, excites the feelings and dazzles the eyes. But even though the vision of this era denotes genuine freedom of the masses and their happy emancipation from the bonds of external authoritarian structures, it warns also of the dangers of a period of chaos and demagoguery, and the threat of a return to the authority of the individual, the sect and party, instead of the authority of the people. Theoretically, this is genuine democracy but, realistically, the strong always rules, i.e., the stronger party in the society is the one that rules (pp. 36-37)
Some unanswered questions?

“Technically at least Libya is one of the few countries in the world to practice direct democracy” (Mattes, 2008, p. 59).

**On political parties in Libya**
- banned before Gaddafi, under the monarchy in 1952
- 1972, all political parties were again officially banned, except for one
- In June 1972, Arab Socialist Union: Libya became, for a while, a one-party system, on the way to no parties
The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy, C.B. Macpherson: “A pyramidal system will not provide real responsibility of the government to all the levels below in an immediately post-revolutionary situation; at least it will not do so if the threat of counter-revolution, with or without foreign intervention, is present. For in that case, democratic control, with all its delays, has to give way to central authority. That was the lesson of the immediate aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. A further lesson, to be drawn from the subsequent Soviet experience, is that, if a revolution bites off more than it can chew democratically, it will chew it undemocratically” (p. 109)

“the possibility of moving to a participatory democracy”: “when one thinks of the forces opposed to such a change, one might hesitate to put the chances as high as 50/50. One need only think of the power of multi-national corporations; of the probability of the increasing penetration into home affairs of secret intelligence agencies such as the American C.I.A.…and of the increasing use of political terrorism by outraged minorities of right and left, with the excuse they give governments of moving into the practices of the police state, and even getting a large measure of popular support for the police state” (p. 107)
Libyan Opinions on Multi-Party Electoral Democracy

2012, Institute of Human Sciences at the University of Oxford, University of Benghazi: “First National Survey of Libya”

(a) **Multi-party elections are irrelevant:** Only 62% are aware of political parties of which three quarters mistrust them….In fact, only 5% confirm that a national election is a policy priority”. Also, 55% said they would never join a political party.

(b) **Strong leader:** “People prefer a single or a group of leaders over democratic models….only 15% favour a form of democracy….Not wanted are religious leaders and military figures,” the latter describing the types who took power after Gaddafii was overthrown. Strikingly, 70% of respondents said they wanted a single, strong leader.

(c) **Participatory democracy:** “69% insist ordinary citizens should have a say in how the country should develop”—73% expressed a preference for a “Libyan-style democracy” with 25% wanting a “Western-style” one

(d) **State support:** only 5% agreed with the idea of ending the state’s social support system and public sector hiring (more than 80% of Libyans depended on public sector employment)

(e) **Equitable distribution of wealth:** 95% want to see equal distribution of oil revenues among Libyan citizens

(f) **Independence:** the biggest group of respondents, 38%, were “adamant that ‘Libya needs no model’”—specifically referring to the idea of importing or following other countries’ models