Liberal democracy, education and social justice in Africa

Elizabeth Magano Amukugo
University of Namibia

Abstract

It is a widely accepted view that military and other forms of authoritarian rule were employed in the governance of certain African countries during the early years of post-colonial period from the 1960s to 1980's as indicated by Bangura (1992), Harber (1997) and Leon (2010). Besides, a few socialist-oriented, independent one-party states existed. The latter years (1990s into the 21st century), saw many independent African countries embracing 'liberal democracy' accompanied by market economic models. The introduction of liberal democracy on the African continent has not been without its controversies however, as some African and Carribean social scientists such as Ake (1993 & 1996), Mafeje (2002), Lumumba-Kasongo, (2005), Ngwane (2006) and Sankatsing (2004), have blamed this system for being responsible for much social wretchedness across Africa. The question is: (a) to what extent has liberal democracy delivered social equity on the continent; and (b) in which way do liberal democratic policies promote or impede the aims of education in a democratic society? Arguing from a critical theory perspective, this Article explores the way in which liberal democracy as a system of governance put limitations on education's capacity to play the transformative role within society. It suggests that liberal democracy advocates equality of opportunities for all at the expense of social justice; and that this prevent education from playing its role as a tool for achieving greater equity within society through promoting human, social and economic development.

Some conceptual considerations

Critical theory as a broad scientific method is founded on the application of critique as a mode of investigation. Its roots originate from a philosophical and social theoretical tradition known as Frankfurt School. Founded in the early years of the twentieth century, its primary aim was to make a meaningful contribution to the struggle against all forms of domination (Darder et al., 2009). Horkheimer in Bohman, (2005), who coined the term 'critical theory', suggested that a theory qualifies to be critical if it strives for "human emancipation". This view is however limited as human emancipation in itself is not enough to bring about social justice unless it is accompanied by practical action. As Bohman (2005) rightly observed, however, three criteria must be met in order to make critical theory suitable for the purpose, namely: that it should be explanatory, practical and normative. In other words, it should explicate the shortcomings within existing social reality; establish the actors for changing the situation; and offer both the standards and attainable goals for social change. It can be argued therefore, that critical theory's main aim is not merely social critique but more importantly to interpret contemporary social reality and to suggest

---

Elizabeth Amukugo is a Namibian educational sociologist. She holds a BSc. (sociology and education); a Master of Social Sc. and a PhD from Lund University, Sweden. A former Member of the Namibian Parliament, she is currently a Senior Lecturer at UNAM. Her academic interests include education and social change; the quality imperatives in education; education and social justice; and educational leadership.

alternatives based on insightful depiction of the current situation. Within this framework, critical educators' main responsibility is, as Grande in Darder et al., (2009, p.186) points out, to advance a critique and stimulate a debate on "…the social, economic, and political barriers to social justice, as well as to crusade for the transformation of schools, to reflect the imperatives of democracy". This paper is no exception.

From a critical theory perspective, therefore, the concept **democracy** should be subjected to the same social critique in order to determine its meaning and purpose. Such an approach would also make it easier to deal with this notion, which Birch (2007), Carr and Hartnett (1996), Oyugi and Gitonga (1987), and Shivji (1991) suggest is difficult to define. In fact, Michael Apple, in Darder et al., (2009, p. 496), goes a step further by advancing a view that issues like freedom does not have a fixed inference "…but are part of a contested terrain in which different visions of democracy exist on a social field of power in which there are unequal resources to influence the publicly accepted definitions of key words".

It can be argued therefore, that democracy is also contextual, making its aims to differ especially in the South/North dichotomy. Against the backdrop of fragile economies and the scanty resources for the majority of the poor in developing countries, especially in Africa, it is not uncommon to hear the phrase 'people do not eat democracy'. In this context, the term democracy would have its real meaning if it is located within the broader context of the concepts social equity (equitable distribution of social resources) and justice (in terms of the legal and institutional framework that is meant to promote the socio-economic wellbeing of all citizens). This would be best achieved through an elected Government whose resolve is to promote the social and economic wellbeing of the population as a whole. This is precisely so because, as Shivji (2003) submit that the struggle for democracy of the African people was about reclaiming their humanity, dignity and the right to think for themselves. It can be said therefore that, such a degree of independence is achievable when the drivers of change (the people) are conscious of their socio-economic conditions; and when that consciousness leads them to act in order to improve their condition. This reading is in line with Ake (1992, p. 50) (as cited in Isaacman, 2003, pp. 23–24; Lumumba-Kasongo, 1998, p. 124 and Okoth, 2011), who argued that:

> Democracy requires even development, otherwise it cannot give equal opportunities to all, it cannot incorporate all to articulate their interests to negotiate them. It cannot produce a political community in which all are able to enjoy rights, nor avoid compromising justice because it takes the development of consciousness and capabilities to seek to enjoy justice. That is why development, especially even development in this broad sense [,] is an integral part of the process of democratization.

Such an awareness, will not only give the governed a voice, but even better, more capacity to hold their elected representatives accountable. In this sense, democracy will not merely mean voting every five years, but real possibilities for the governed to participate in governance; and by consequence influencing policy decisions affecting their lives. Such a political climate would assist in neutralising what Ake (1996, p.1) pointed out that "by all indications, political conditions in Africa are the greatest impediment to development". His hypothesis is based on what he saw as a contradiction between ideals and practice in African governance structures, which he captured in the following words:

> The ideology of development itself became a problem for development because of the conflict between its manifest and latent functions. The conflict is apparent in the actions of African leaders who proclaimed the need for development and made development the new ideology without necessarily translating it into a program of societal transformation. They did so not because they were uninterested in societal transformation but because their minds were absorbed in the struggle for power and survival (Ake, 1996, p.9).

Ake's observations above laid bare the impact of **liberal democracy** in post-colonial Africa, which in spite of having spread like wild fire on the Continent, has so far not resulted in all-inclusive social and economic benefits for the poor, who make up the majority of populations in Africa. Varied definition of the term notwithstanding, the reasons behind liberal democracy's failure to deliver can be found in its meaning, which entails a form of representative democracy whereby citizens periodically elect representatives to govern, formulate policies and take major decisions on behalf of the electorate and citizenry as a whole. But as Sankatsing (2004, p.4) rightly observed, the resultant democratic appropriation of power does not guarantee a democratic exercise of authority or governing in the people's interest. To the contrary, he argued, liberal democracy has historically meant:

> ... individual-endorsed control of governance and rule over all by vested or new elites derived from the mobilization of existing allegiance or from induced consent. It authorises control of collective assets and command of the destiny of society through individualised electoral process, based on the tenet that a society can be represented fairly by the aggregate of its individual and the arithmetic sum of their votes. ... Under the banner of democracy, individual-based majority rule typically combined elite affluence with widespread misery asphyxiating any real option for development and progress.

Mafeje (2002) went a step further by arguing that liberal democracy is not able to satisfy the political and economic demands [needs] of the people partly because of its failure to recognise that social justice as opposed to formal rights better guarantees equitable access to productive resources. He holds that:

> ... While liberal democracy upholds the principle of equality of all citizens in front of the law, it does not address the question of social equity. Accordingly, it is unable to deal with some of the major issues that have come to haunt contemporary society such as increasing poverty globally and intolerable social injustice within nations and among nations.

Liberal democracy's pretentious discourse has been made possible because of what Amukugo (1998) suggests, is its quest to uphold an equilibrium within society, without achieving equality in the economic sphere, coupled with a tendency to present facts in a fragmented manner rather than providing an integrated picture of a whole. This in turn limits society's capacity to transform in a comprehensive way. As Shivji (2003) submit, social transformation/change is not just a matter of exposition, but more importantly a matter of real life. Criticising liberal democracy's discourse as being based on pretence than reality, he argue that "... the matter of social change and transformation is not one of discourse. The struggle for democracy is ultimately rooted in the life-conditions of the people". This view laid bare the core weakness of liberal democracy, namely its incapacity to seriously consider and tackle the issue of social equity. In essence, this thought gives the

concept democracy a social dimension and stresses both the need and possibility of finding an alternative to liberal democracy, especially in the African context.

The relationship between **education** and democracy should be viewed within the broader framework of the concept democracy as expounded herein. In this context education has a role to play in democratization, by serving as an instrument for developing critical consciousness on the one hand and as a tool for social and economic development on the other hand. For true democracy would broaden the aims of education to include, in addition to technical skills, critical consciousness of one's social and economic conditions and the capacity to act upon that reality, with the purpose of changing it to the better. Freire (1974, pp. 33-34) put it more succinctly that:

> … education our situation demanded would enable men to discuss courageously the problems of their context – and to intervene in that context; it would warn men of the dangers of the time and offer them the confidence and the strength to confront those dangers instead of surrendering their sense of self through submission to the decisions of others. By predisposing men to re-evaluate constantly, to analyse "findings" to adopt scientific methods and process, and to perceive themselves in dialectical relationship with their social reality, that education could help men to assume an increasingly critical attitude toward the world and so to transform it.

Freire (1996) expounded further the exact method of achieving critical consciousness through education, by elucidating that education serves as a tool for achieving critical consciousness through objectification – the act of gaining a distance from both oneself and the world around him/her through a critical reflection of reality. However, he also illuminated further that comprehension of reality (objective world) is not enough to bring about social change but needs to be combined with practical action, what he term praxis. In this way, Freire skilfully combines the idealist with the materialist perspective; and as such hold true to the critical theory perspective with its credence in mixed mode of social enquiry.

In his analysis of "citizenship education", a major proponent of critical theory, Giroux (1980, p.331), articulated the difference between "old rationality" and "new rationality' and suggested that in order for citizenship education to contribute to the creation of a just society, the relationship between school and the wider society needs to be redefined. This implies moving away from stressing issues of "technique, objectivity & control [a positivistic scientific approach] to a rationality that leans on understanding and critique. In fact, this discussion continues into the 21st Century and forms the basis on which the proponents of technical rationality move to do away with educational foundations as vital subjects for teachers. As Amukugo et al., (2010), (in Karras & Wolhuter 2010, p.807) rightly observed, whilst technocratic rationality view the teacher as a "…repertoire of technical skills… the critical/transformative paradigm … views the teacher as a critical and transformative intellectual, whose role is to place those technical skills into the political and socio-economic context". We can thus safely conclude that if the ultimate goal of education is social change by means of education for critical consciousness, then liberal democracy, with its emphasis on freedom, equality and equal opportunity at the abstract level; and its focus on political and legal rights at the expense of **social justice**, cannot deliver equity in the education sphere. This is so because social justice is about equitable redistribution of societal resources and thereby creating a just society where citizens enjoy much more than equality before the law.

Democracy, education and social justice in Africa

Education contributes to socio-economic development by equipping many individuals with knowledge, skills and cultural resources which, when appropriately utilised to serve individual and societal needs, can help society to grow. Education has a political function as well: it enables individuals to become conscious of themselves and the world around them. Society's greatest asset is, therefore, without doubt, its people. From this point of view, democratic governance should serve to empower those who go through the education system by providing quality education in an equitable manner. In this respect, a focus on social equity as opposed to merely social equality is crucial if democracy is to have a practical meaning. This is primarily because, whilst the liberal democratic notion of *equality* is about sameness and equal opportunities according to ability, it does not address issues of socio-economic inequities based on social class. *Equity*, on the other hand, is about redressing historically unjust treatment in order to achieve social justice, eliminate socio-economic barriers, and redistribute public resources and services fairly. The equity perspective is therefore, better equipped to solve the grave concern expressed by the African Union (2004, Article 6) that: nearly 50% of the continents populations is living under the poverty line; about 140 million are unable to provide their families with a "sustainable livelihood"; and that Africa is unable to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in view of the low economic growth. Besides, the African Union (2008, p. 1) observed in its Windhoek Declaration on Social Development that:

> … despite significant strides in some areas of political, social and economic development in Africa during the last decade, these developments have not made significant impact on the lives of the majority of the African people, especially the vulnerable and marginalised groups.

With the above in mind, the African Union (2008), went a step further and developed a Plan of Action whose aim is to turn round the current situation "of pervasive and persistent poverty, unemployment and under-employment on the continent" by, among other things, building capacity through education and training. Such a turnaround would, in my view, require a combination of changes within the social and economic arena, supported by education and political will. But what type of democratic governance can do the trick?

Dunleavy & O'Leary (1987, p. 4), for example, comparing Athenian direct democracy with liberal democracy, argue that:

> … the [Athenian] assembly of citizens was sovereign on all matters, and a majority vote decided every political issue; citizens had very effective instruments for controlling their major elected officials.

In contrast, they argue that, in liberal democracy, citizens only exercise their sovereignty during elections, leaving the executive decision-making to the rulers. The authors note that the power to recall elected officials in a liberal democracy is very limited – making the citizen body sovereign in name only.

Another critical voice on the negative effect of liberal democracy on the socio-economic well-being of African peoples is Cassen (2001), (cited in Ngwane, 2006, pp. 1–2), who sees liberal democracy in Africa as being a tool for enriching a few at the expense of the majority. He contends that:

> The African technocratic elites have been evasive of a democratic substance

(economic development, social security, etc.) in favour of a democratic form that emphasises mainly party formation, elections and constitutional engineering. … For many political leaders, the holding of multiparty election is nothing but an alibi aimed at qualifying them for the benefits of benevolent globalisation …

Ngwane (2006, p. 2) added that:

> … in fact, the concept of party formation under multiparty [formation] has not been a conduit to articulating the interest of the masses, but a source of primitive wealth accumulation (utility outcome) for politicians.

Against the above background, it is necessary to take into account an observation made by Levin (2005) that:

> What we have reached might be described as the paradox of liberal democracy – that the parts are in contradiction, for how can we be equal politically when we are so unequal economically?

In the same vein, Lumumba-Kasongo (2005, pp. 4–5) points out what he perceives to be a paradox between what liberal democracy is expected to achieve and its implication for socio-economic conditions in Africa. He suggests that, while Africa is adopting liberal democracy as the most promising formula for unleashing individual energy and generating political participation, African social and economic conditions are worsening. Part of the problem, according to him, could be because of what he sees as the lack of a higher level of social consciousness among the populace as regards their social conditions. Even so, it is appropriate at this juncture for one to ask that crucial question, namely what type of social institution can provide that kind of social consciousness?

Freire (1974) can perhaps provide us with an answer through his theory of "education for critical consciousness", by means of which human beings can acquire the appropriate tools that enable them to change their milieu as individuals and as members of a society.

The importance of social consciousness in this regard has also been stressed by Gabbard and Appleton (2005), who bequeath the responsibility to develop what they refer to as "democratic consciousness" to 'paedeia'. In addition, Fotopoulos (1997, p. 209) defines the latter as moving beyond education to include "character development and 'a well-rounded' education in knowledge and skills". Fotopoulos (2007) developed the paedeia notion further by elaborating on how it can play a vital role in a "direct democracy framework" by enhancing the place and role of the individual in society, through suggesting that:

> … we do not talk of education anymore but about the much broader concept of Paedeia in the sense of an all-round civic education that involves a life-long process of character development, absorption of knowledge and skills and – more significant – practicing a 'participatory' kind of active citizenship, that is a citizenship in which political activity is not seen as a means to an end but an end in itself.

It is not the intention of this researcher to commit herself to Fotopoulos' concept of *direct democracy*. Nevertheless, the above argument, in as far as it relates to paedeia's role in developing social consciousness and in broadening democratic participation by

the citizenry, makes sense. This is true when viewed against the social reality in many African countries, where a lack of social consciousness – due mainly to a lack of education – contributes to the blind acceptance of undemocratic governance and its unopposed continuance.

A strong critic of liberal democracy, Fotopoulos (1997, pp. 176–183) goes to the other extreme and contradicts the democracy dictum *rule by the people* by suggesting that, with the exception of a form of direct democracy that takes into account broader social and economic spheres, all other forms of democracy – representative, parliamentary and liberal – are simply forms of oligarchy, namely rule by the few. An alternative definition of *democracy*, he argues, must include a definition of the notion *freedom*, which links individual freedom to collective freedom, as well as the notion *autonomy*, which enables the individual and society to question existing belief systems, ideas and values associated with the 'dominant social paradigm'. He contends that an 'autonomous society' is only possible where 'autonomous individuals' exist, and vice versa. Thus, Fotopoulos' conception of *society* refers to a social order that is made up of 'social individuals' capable of transforming existing social institutions (within which the ruling minority's power is concentrated) and creating their own world. This, in his view, is different from liberal individualism, which promotes the notion of *citizenship*, where the individual is a passive holder of certain political rights and individual freedoms. It is also different from socialist collectivism, he argues, which, by virtue of separating the State from society, inevitably promotes the concept of *citizenship* whereby an individual becomes an inactive bearer of rights.

Fotopoulos' notion of *social individuals*, in the absence of which a lack of social consciousness can prevail, may largely be addressed through a relevant education of good quality, which, apart from developing a critical and creative mind, can enhance people's capacity to change and improve their situation-a democratic imperative.

Nevertheless, the need to develop social consciousness cannot be limited to the general populace. It is equally important for those charged with the responsibility to ensure the realisation of a democratic agenda to not only embrace, but also internalise and practise a democratic culture – with the ethos, principles, values and beliefs that entails. Therefore, the realisation of a true democratic practice within a given society presupposes a high level of social consciousness amongst both the governed and those who govern (not the rulers), which includes an internalisation of and a commitment to a democratic ethos, such as that inscribed in a constitution. Such a democratic ideal would not only minimise the possibility of State institutions being used as springboards for economic and political expediency, it would also enable the citizenry to play a more effective role in the choice of political representatives. In addition, the people's participation in decision-making processes at various levels of society will become more effective as it would be based on informed positions. These possibilities lead us to reaffirm and embrace *constitutional democracy*, which denotes a system of government based on popular sovereignty, whereby institutional structure – including the powers, functions and limitations of, for example, the three branches of democratic governance, namely the legislative, executive and judiciary – are enshrined in a constitution. As a democratic governance tool, however, constitutional democracy becomes more effective when the executive and legislative powers are not only formally, but also practically separated so as to ensure that power is balanced among the three distinct arms of the Government and allow a more just, representative governance to take place. This democratic model implies a bigger role

for education, more especially where it serves as a tool for social consciousness and, by implication, as the principal foundation for democracy.

From sociology of education perspective, one of the major aims of schooling is the transmission of knowledge, skills and values that society regards as necessary for its continuous existence. In this respect, education can play its role in instilling democratic principles and thereby help to disseminate constitutional values. In view of the important social function of education as set out above and as elucidated by Amukugo (1995), Datta (1984) and Harber (1997) among others, it can be postulated that education has a major role to play in bringing about social equity.

However, it needs to be emphasised that education does not function in a vacuum: it is part and parcel of a given society. Therefore, if it is agreed in principle that socio-economic inequities remain a problem in Africa, even in the 21st century, and that this has implications for both educational development and socio-economic growth, and then it can be agreed that liberal democracy as a form of governance has not and will not deliver the equity Africa seeks. This is because, whilst 'liberal democracy' emphasises equal opportunity, this is done at the expense of equity and justice (social fairness), with regard to the provision of education and the distribution of resources (physical, material, financial and human). This leaves liberal democracy wanting in terms of adequately explaining the relationship between democracy and education; how to address the prevailing socio-economic inequities that continue to confront many African countries; and of how to utilise education as a tool for enhancing social and economic development through empowering those who are undergoing such development.

The type of education Africa seeks, therefore, is not only one that enables citizens to competently participate in social, economic and political affairs that affect their lives, but also one that produces skilled individuals capable of creating knowledge, employment and wealth for themselves and for society. In whatever way, it is important to recognise that education is not the sole prerequisite for democratic participation, as being human in itself can provide the impetus for such involvement. As Freire (1996, p. 14) observes:

> … every human being, no matter how "ignorant" or submerged in the "culture of silence" he or she may be, is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with proper tools for such encounter, the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as other contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of reality, and deal critically with it.

Although Freire emphasises the point that any human being can have the capacity to interrogate his/her situation critically, he was quick to point out the condition under which this can happen, namely through the provision of appropriate tools. In other words, Freire, who promoted adult education, firmly believed in the capacity of education to assist even the most ignorant in perceiving their social and economic reality, which may induce changes in the social and economic spheres. However, one can hasten to add that being human - concomitant with experience gained through a given socio-economic reality - can in itself provide tools for comprehending one's personal and social situation. Colonial oppression in Africa and the subsequent participation of thousands of uneducated people in the wars of liberation across the continent is testimony to that possibility. Nevertheless, the importance of education cannot be underestimated in as far is it serves to enhance

151

the quality of such participation. Plato's foresight in this regard is also laudable. He was convinced that the State would be competently governed if rulers were to attain the level of "philosopher kings" – an idea he borrowed from his teacher, Socrates. As Plato clearly suggests in Book V of *The Republic*, (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1974, p. 50):

> [t]he society we have described can never grow into reality or see the light of day, and there will be no end to the troubles of states, or indeed, my dear Glaucon, of humanity itself, till philosophers become rulers in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers, and political power and philosophy thus come into the same hand …

Although Plato was not thinking in terms of social equity and justice the way we know them today, he recognised the apparent connection between education, the quality of political participation as well as of governance; which is relevant today.

Besides, the opening of a mind, as an educational purpose, is not enough: what one does with that consciousness is equally important. Amukugo, Likando and Mushaandja (2010, p. 102) explain this point more succinctly:

> … education does not only help in opening one's mind and opening one's scope, it also provides human beings with the capacity to act upon their environment rather than being conditioned by it.

This is the spirit in which this article is written. In searching for an alternative to liberal democracy, therefore, it makes sense to support a conception of *democracy* that is entrenched in the broader social and economic sphere, and which can create a suitable linkage between the concepts *democracy* and *education*. Constitutional democracy provides that possibility, provided that it makes prominent issues of social equity, in addition to the principals of equality of all citizens.

An alternative to liberal democracy in order for education to serve its real purpose

This study has shown that there is a renewed interest by scholars in the concept *democracy* in the African context, with a general assessment pointing to the inadequacy of 'liberal democracy' to deliver on addressing the socio-economic inequities on the African continent. The second last country in Africa to embrace liberal democracy after gaining political independence is Namibia. A country which has been designated as an "electoral democracy" by the Freedom House, 2011 and has received a 2.0 rating on a 1-7 scale. But what does this rating mean in terms of the quality of democracy as well as in terms of equity within the education system? It is no secret that Namibia has been marked by an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor in socio-economic terms and in terms of educational provision. The Government of the Republic of Namibia (2008) confirms this attestation, by concluding that:

> [a] comparison with countries for which comparable data is available suggests that the level of inequality in Namibia is among the highest in the world. (PAGE NUMBER????????)

The above study suggests further that the consumption level of the richest 10% is 50 times

higher than the poorest 10%. The apparent socio-economic inequalities have implications for education. As an example, the World Bank (2005, p. 38) review of education in Namibia took a look at the student achievements at the national level and found that poor regions performed worse than students from affluent regions. On this basis the study suggested that unequal education opportunities as reflected in the distribution of learning outcomes, lead to a reproduction of social inequalities. This is not surprising as the current reality on the ground show that the differences in socio-economic status limit the choice of school by an individual child/parent. Since the quality of education differ in different schools within cities and across regions, the children from disadvantaged backgrounds get a raw deal. Amukugo (2010, p.12)'s analyses confirm this analogy. Referring to educational situation in independent Namibia she contends that: "… access to education meant different things to the poor and affluent communities and regions of our country respectively, as the differences in socio-economic conditions largely determined which school an individual child or student was able to attend."

Moreover, the Government of the Republic of Namibia (1999, p. 98), arrived at a conclusion that:

> … very many children are getting an education which is greatly inferior to that enjoyed by town dwellers and which does not give every Namibian child an equal opportunity of achieving the best of which he or she is capable. It is clear that the root cause of this deprivation is the unequal distribution of educational resources…

These material realities exist, in spite of the liberal democratic government in Namibia advocating freedom of choice and equality of opportunity for its entire population without exception. Thus, even though Namibia's 10 - year programme, the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP), whose aim is to substantially enhance the contribution of education to the attainment of Namibia Vision 2030's strategic goal of transforming Namibia into a knowledge economy (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 2007). Such an ambition can only be achieved if accompanied by significant socio-economic transformation that would meaningfully address social inequality.

It can be argued, therefore, that the main problem with liberal democracy is its pretentious nature: elected representatives, while claiming to embody the will of the people, focus on enriching themselves and serving minority interests, especially through cronyism. In the same vein, liberal democracy shows its true colours in the tendency of politicians to orate on the notions of *freedom* and *equal opportunity* without fundamentally obligating themselves to actualising the principles of 'equity' described herein. Yet democracy, as a form of governance, ought to be the means through which elected representatives look after the material well-being of a nation, while encouraging resourcefulness and the multiple cultural, aesthetic and intellectual expressions of all societal members to flourish unhindered. It is within such a social environment that education can have a meaningful role to play – more so because education reflects the society within which it functions. What, then, is the alternative to liberal democracy? How will a different form of governance create a more useful linkage between democracy and education?

In searching for an alternative to liberal democracy, it is necessary to critically examine the views held by its staunch critics and its corresponding market economy. Fotopoulos (1997) suggests that, in place of political representation – which, in his view, is a form of oligarchy

– citizens need to be given an opportunity to participate fully in the social and economic affairs affecting their lives, through direct democracy. He further contends that to establish any kind of democracy presupposes that direct democracy can be institutionalised through the creation of a "citizen body" that makes it possible for "members of a geographical community" to participate fully in the decision-making process. This would lead to political and economic power being vested in the citizens as opposed to politicians being invested with such power on the citizens' behalf. This is Fotopoulos' version of an "inclusive democracy". Although Fotopoulos acknowledges that liberal democracy provides broader representation than socialism, the direct democracy and economic democracy he proposes would entail "self-management" in a society where the State, money, and the market economy are abolished. Thus, whilst one can agree with Fotopoulos' view that the capitalist market economy in a liberal democracy cannot satisfy the basic socio-economic needs of all its citizens, the convergence of this paper's main argument and his ends there because replacing government with the "citizen body", as proposed by him, would lead in my view lead to anarchy. Dunleavy & O'Leary (1987, pp. 1-2), express a similar view to that presented in this paper, by contending that: "[s]ome form of government is intrinsic to [modern] human society, because a society which is totally uncontrolled, unguided and unregulated is a contradiction in terms."

Within the African context, therefore, it would be more appropriate to adopt a nationally contextualised constitutional democracy that not only focus on political and legal rights, but more importantly place an emphasis on socio-economic rights, in a bid to address social inequalities. The values entrenched in a constitution can – as it does in Namibia's case – depict an ideal just society while it promotes inequalities in practice. It is crucial, therefore that, whilst the content of a constitution might not pose a problem, the extent to which constitutional provisions are observed in practice can be problematic, which makes the need for a written constitution paramount. The strength of a written constitution is also illustrated by Du Pisani (2010, p. 10), who sees such a constitution founded on the following:

- Major governance principles and key constitutional principles are entrenched, safeguarding them from interference by the government of the day
- The power of the legislature is constrained, limiting its sovereignty
- Non-political judges are able to ensure that constitutional provisions are upheld by public institutions
- Individual liberty is generally more securely protected, and
- It has considerable educational value, in that it embodies the core values and overall goals of the political system.

The educational value of a constitution is further amplified by Diescho (2010, p. 20), who suggests that it "… comprises a common understanding and acceptance of what is acceptable, honourable, despicable, or worthy of rewarding, let alone permitting of leadership in a given society.

In other words, a constitution influences the total culture of a nation - its entire way of being.

Therefore, democratic governance in the context of a constitutional democracy can enhance real commitment to addressing the distressing socio-economic situation across the African continent through, among other things, providing an all-round transformative education that not only promote social consciousness, but also induces action that leads to socio-economic change. This latter point is more crucial, especially against the backdrop of Ake's useful observation that "it takes the development of consciousness and capabilities

to seek to enjoy justice", (cited in Isaacman, 2003, pp. 23–24; and Okoth, 2011). Ake's view helps to illuminate the importance of education in the development of consciousness. Fotopoulos (1997, p. 216), recognises this significance when he talks about the necessary conditions for democracy. He holds that, in order to avoid manipulation of the *demos* ("population") by professional politicians, "the sufficient condition" is "… crucially determined by the citizens' level of democratic consciousness which, in turn, is conditioned by *paedeia*." This is how education can play a transformative role within a given society.

Conclusion

There is clearly an inherent contradiction between the theory and practice of liberal democracy, in terms of its promises to the citizenry and reality on the ground. This paradox can be best addressed through a critical theory of the state, whose main critique of liberal democracy centres on the fact that a liberal democratic state depicts itself as a just institution which serves the interest of all citizens – a suggestion that is not only 'false', but also 'illusory' (Amukugo,1995). Thus, an alternative to liberal democracy as a form of governance is needed to help move towards the achievement of social equity, especially in Africa. In terms of education, therefore, a liberal democracy would produce inequities in the provision of education, access to it, participation in it, learner and student achievements, and/or educational outcomes, since the socio-economic conditions of individuals from different social classes are bound to determine the type and quality of education available to them. An alternative form of democratic governance should be one by means of which a Constitutional Democratic Government can guarantee not just freedoms and equality of opportunities in abstract, but more significantly better socio-economic conditions for all its citizens. This can however, only be possible if strict mechanisms are created, that would prevent Government Elites from manipulating government system for their own selfish ends. Such a move would also make it possible for basic needs such as food, housing, health services and education to be broadly provided for by the State through a just redistribution of societal resources. At the same time, we should be cognisant of the fact that resource redistribution presupposes that inherent inequalities within the production process, that are normally carried over into the distribution process under liberal democracy, are rooted out, to allow fair redistribution to take place. The implication of this proposal is that quality education for all would be guaranteed and would be provided free of charge from pre-primary education right up to university level. The consequence of this would be that the liberal democratic forms of governance that are widespread in Africa can be reformed and/or replaced by a people-centred constitutional democracy that has as its main goal the redistribution of societal resources. This move will not only narrow down the current gap between the rich and the poor on the African continent, but, the political representatives in the new African constitutional democracies would not only be guided by a democratic constitution, which they often ignore, but they will be compelled through watertight parliamentary oversight mechanisms (checks and balances) to become true representatives of the interests, needs and expectations of the people. Such an arrangement, in concert with institutional mechanisms that promote informed civic participation in social, economic and cultural affairs, can go a long way towards building a more just society. In this context, education can serve its real purpose which is to foster social consciousness and promote economic well-being for all.

References

African Union (2004). *Declaration on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa*. Retrieved from http://www.africaunion.org/EMPLOYMENT/declaration%20on%20employment%20and%20poverty%20alleviation.pdf

African Union (2008). *Windhoek Declaration on Social Development*. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2009/Ghana/au1.pdf

Ake, C. (1993). *The unique case of African democracy*. Retrieved from http://facultyfiles.deanza.edu/gems/kaufmancynthia/Ake.pdf

Ake, C. (1996). *Democracy and Development in Africa*. Retrieved from http://books.google.com.na/books?hl.

Akinpelu, J. A. (1981). *An introduction to philosophy of education*. London: Macmillan.

Amukugo, EM. (1995). *Education and politics in Namibia: Past trends and future prospects*. (2nd ed.). Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan.

Amukugo, EM. (1998 April). Can liberal democracy deliver equity in education? *Southern African Political and Economic Monthly*. 11(6), 11–14.

Amukugo, E.M., Likando, G.N.& Mushaandja, J. (2010). Access and quality dilemma in education: Implication for Namibia's Vision 2030. *Higher Education Forum*, 7, pp 101–111.

Amukugo, E.M., Likando, G.N., Shakwa, G.N. & Nyambe, J. (2010). A Critical Review of Teacher Education in Namibia. In Karras, K.G & Wolhuter, C.C (Eds.), *International Handbook on Teacher Education Worldwide: Issues and Challenges for teacher education*. Athens: Atrapos editions. pp 805-822.

Amukugo, E.M (2010, March 21). Education in Namibia: Twenty Years past and Twenty Years on. New Era Twentieth Independence Anniversary Special Publication. pp 12-13.

Bangura, Y. (1992). "Authoritarian rule and democracy in Africa". In Gibbon, P. Y., Bangura and A Ofstad (eds). *Authoritarianism, democracy and adjustment: The politics of economic reform in Africa*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies. pp 39-82.

Bohman, J. (2005). Critical Theory. In The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2012 Ed.), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/critical-theory/>.

Bohrat, H, C van der Westhuizen and T Jacobs. (2009). Income and non-income inequality in post-apartheid South Africa: What are the drivers and possibly policy interventions?. *Development Policy Research Unit Working Paper 09/138*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Birch, AH. (2007). *The concepts and theories of modern democracy* (3rd ed). London: Routledge.

Bloom, A. (1991). *The Republic of Plato* (2nd ed.). New York: Basic Books.

Bowen, J and PR Hobson. (1974). *Theories of education*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Carr, W and A Hartnett. (1996). *Education and the struggle for democracy: The politics of educational ideas*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Collins Dictionary of Sociology (2nd ed.). (1995). Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers.

Datta, A. (1984). *Education and society: A sociology of African education*. London: Macmillan.

Darder, A., Baltodano, M.P. and Torres, R.D. (Eds.) (2009). *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, second edition. London: Routledge.

Dewey, J. (2010). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. Lexington, KY: BLN Publishing.

Diescho, J. (2010). The impact of the constitution on state- and nation-building. In Bösl, A., Horn, N. and Du Pisani, A. (Eds). *Constitutional democracy in Namibia: A critical analysis after two decades*. Windhoek: Macmillan Education Namibia. pp 17-33.

Du Pisani, A. (2010). The paradigm of constitutional democracy: Genesis, implications and limitations. In Bösl, A, N Horn and A du Pisani (Eds.). *Constitutional democracy in Namibia: A critical analysis after two decades*. Windhoek: Macmillan Education Namibia. pp 3-15.

Dunleavy,P and B O'Leary.(1987). *Theories of the state: The politics of liberal democracy*. London: Macmillan.

Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin.

Fotopoulos, T. (1997). *Toward an inclusive democracy: The crisis of the growth economy and the need for a new liberatory project*. London: Cassell. Retrieved from http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/fotopoulos/english/brbooks/brtid/brtid.htm.

Fotopoulos, T. (2005). *The multidimensional crisis and inclusive democracy*. Available at http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journals/ss/ch11.htm.

Fotopoulos, T. (2007). Recent theoretical developments on the Inclusive Democracy Project. In Best, S (ed.). *Global capitalism and the demise of the Left: Renewing radicalism through inclusive democracy*. Available at http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/fotopoulos/english/brbooks/Recent_Developments.html.

Freedom House, (2011). Available at http://africanelections.tripod.com/fh2011.html.

Freire, P. (1974). *Education for critical consciousness*. London: Sheed and Waad.

Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* London: Penguin.

Gabbart, D. & Appleton, K.A. (2005). The democratic paideia project: beginnings of an emancipatory paideia for today. *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, 2 (1). Available at http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol2/vol2_no1_gabbard_appleton_PRINTABLE.htm

Giroux, H.A. (1980) Critical Theory and Rationality in Citizenship Education. In Curriculum Inquiry. Vol. 10 (4). Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/1179823

Government of the Republic of Namibia. (2008). *A review of poverty and equality in Namibia*. Windhoek: National Planning Commission.

Government of the Republic of Namibia (2007). *Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP): Planning for a Learning Nation.* (Ministry of Education programme document, phase 1, 2006-2011). Windhoek: Namibia.

Government of the Republic of Namibia (1999). *Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training*, Vol. 1. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan.

Harber, C. (1997). *Education, Democracy and Political Development in Africa*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press.

Isaacman, A. (2003). "Legacies of engagement: Scholarship Informed by political commitment". *African Studies Review*, 46(1). pp 1–41.

Leon, T. (2010). *The state of liberal democracy in Africa: Resurgence or retreat?.* Available at http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11717.

Levin, M. (2005). Still taking democracy seriously. *International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, 1(3). Available at

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol1/vol1_no3_levin_PRINTABLE.htm.

Lumumba-Kasongo, T. (1998). The rise of multipartisim and democracy in the context of global change. The Case of Africa. Oxford: Greenwood Publishing.

Lumumba-Kasongo, T. (Ed.). 2005. *Liberal democracy and its critics in Africa: Political dysfunction and the struggle for social progress.* Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa.

Mafeje, A. (2002). Democratic governance and new democracy in Africa: Agenda for the future. Retrieved from http://www.worldsummit2002.org/texts/ArchieMafeje2.pdf

Ngwane, MG. (2006). Deconstructing liberal democracy in Africa. Available from http://www.gngwane.com/2006/01/deconstructing_.html.

Okoth, P.G. (1998). Democracy and development in Africa. *Journal of Third World Studies*, Spring. Available at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3821/is_199804/ai_n8802162/?tag=content;col1

Oyugi, W.O. & Gitonga, A. (1995). *Democratic theory and practice in Africa*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.

Sankatsing, G. (2004). People's Vote Compatible with People's Fate: A democratic alternative to liberal democracy. In *Political Democracy, Social Democracy and the Market in the Caribbean*. Available from http://www.crscenter.com/Democracy.pdf

Shivji, I.G. (2003). *The Struggle for Democracy*. Available from http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/shivji/struggle-democracy.htm

Shivji, I.G. (Ed.). (1991). *An African Debate on Democracy*. Harare: Southern African Political Economic Series (SAPES).

World Bank (2008). *Namibia Human Capital and Knowledge Development for Economic Growth with Equity*. (Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series – No. 84). Washington: USA: M. T. Marope.