Multi-Party Democracy and It’s Relevance in Africa

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Introduction

Africa is at the beginning of the 21st century searching desperately for a workable paradigm for political order, which answers to the challenges and peculiarities of African society without creating scope for arguments of exceptionalism in an increasingly globalizing world in, which shared political ideals are becoming more the rule than the exception. This cannot however mean that political formulae must be totally identical or a conceptual strait-jacket which must fit us all irrespective of societal details. One of the popular wisdoms of our times is that, while we acknowledge the global we must permit fully the celebration of the local.

But, when that has been said, we must also admit that, of all the political myths of the 20th century, none has been as universally successful and, indeed, as triumphant, by the end of the century, as the idea of democracy. During the course of the century it was denied, challenged, but also wooed and cultivated, by various groups and peoples. With the collapse of the Soviet Empire, its triumph as a Western claim to historical vitality became, for our times, without question. But if this triumph represented the triumph of Western liberal democracy, there remain many of us who, as earlier said, question its automatic transferability to all societies and cultures without consideration, for socio-cultural and historical specificity. It is my view that democracy and freedom both at the individual and collective levels of social life will remain infectious political doctrinal potions for the coming generation/generations. But, if the experience of human history is anything to go by, we can say, without fear of contradiction that different peoples and societies will find different meanings to this myth, and this variability will be historically exhibited both diachronically and synchronically.

Multi-party political systems are generally regarded as the most reliable systems for the cultivation, development and institutionalization of democracy. The multi-party model lies at the heart of the tradition of modern liberal democracy. Its central advantage is that, in modern capitalist society, it permits the coexistence of contrastive views of how social life should be ordered without suffocating relatively inferior constituencies. It allows “a hundred flowers to bloom and a hundred schools of thought to contend”. It is the structure, par excellence, of political pluralism in modern bourgeois society. It permits policy options to contest for popular support in order to be governmentally adoptable. Multi-party systems appear as proportional representational formulae or direct majoritarian “winner-takes-all” arrangements. So far, historically, African ruling groups have favoured this latter arrangement. While it certainly has weaknesses, on a balance-sheet, the multi-party system has more to offer us today, than any other system we currently have in use. Working in tandem with the institution of the rule of law, it provides a generally effective basis for the watch on human rights adherence.

Today, it is generally accepted that human and civil rights are crucial issues to modern humanity and closely allied to the idea of human rights are the related notions of democracy or representative government. Hardly anybody today, will deny, like Hitler
and Mussolini did, the validity and need for human rights and representative
government. The cry of the American revolutionists, in the war against Britain, that there
will be “no taxation without representation” has passed into popular human political
folklore. Democracy has become the political God of our times. The danger, sometimes,
is that those Western liberal societies which claim the heights of the democratic edifice
of humanity also frequently assume to be the paragons of social morality, a claim which
cannot be upheld by the realities of history, replete with their cruelties and barbarities,
past and present, wreaked on humanity as a whole.

The African Record on Democracy and Multi-Partyism

Africa’s experience of the practice of multi-party democracy in state politics has been
checkered and tortuous. During the past 4 – 5 decades of Africa’s post-independence
experience, the search for a sound and viable formula for governance and democratic
institutionalization has largely eluded Africans. Many administrations on this continent
have started off with pious resolutions swearing to the intention of maintaining
democratic systems but have, with time, quickly fallen prey to autocracy and
authoritarianism.

It has now become popular wisdom to suggest that in many countries on the African
continent, the only elections that have been very free and without any taint of vote
rigging or unfair electoral practices within multi-party systems have been the elections,
which ushered in the first post-independence governments. In many instances,
subsequent elections have been manipulated to produce results favourable to incumbent
regimes. The exceptional cases in recent years of governments being voted out of
power have been in Zambia (1990) in the elections, which saw the replacement of the
Kaunda regime, with the Chiluba administration and the Ghanaian case of December
2000, which saw the demise of the Rawlings administration and its replacement with the
Kuffour regime. The third classic case of a smooth and fairly open change of
government through the ballot box was the Senegalese case, which saw the
replacement of the Abdou Diouf government by the Abdualai Wade administration. There
was the instance in Zimbabwe where the ruling ZANU –PF’s favoured position was
defeated in a referendum (2000); only to be followed by the much decried and
questioned 2002 elections. There is no case, in recent years, in Africa, of governmental
change-over through the ballot box outside these three examples, except in those cases
where a civilian administration has come into power after some years of military
dictatorship. Otherwise what we have are numerous examples of cases in which the
same ruling group or party manages by more foul than fair means to perpetuate its rule
through sham and carefully engineered electoral processes.

Too often, international observers have been too quick and ready to pronounce
fraudulent elections as free and fair, because, the externals and formal processes are
seen to have been fairly conducted. Sometimes, in order to avoid the dangers of civil
strife following such elections, international observers have been unwilling to emphasize
the record of dubious practices, which in other societies of the world may constitute
grounds for assessing the elections as being of doubtful status.

Many Africans were quick to gloat and laugh at the American elections of 2001, which
saw the ascendancy of George W. Bush. In those elections, his rival Al Gore clearly
pollled a higher popular vote, nationwide, than the winner. The winner got through
metaphorically, by the skin of his teeth, in a deciding state (Florida) where his brother
was Governor. A saga of counting and recounting of “punched”, “pregnant” and “un-punched” ballot papers punctuated the whole exercise. In the end, the whole saga was brought to a close by a Supreme Court decision, which was itself not contentious because of the apparent vote of the judges along lines of political disposition. Africans were quick to point out that the malaise of fraudulent elections is not restricted or congenital to Africa, that even the self-proclaimed leader of the democratic world can be caught, with its pants down, on this score. In light relief, an academic colleague made the point that ex-President Carter and the *Carter Centre*, which has done so much, all over the world, to ensure the maintenance of free and fair electoral procedures, was silent about the American election saga.

Elections are one thing and the practice of governance another. After elections the issue of governance assumes centrality in the political, social and economic lives of the citizenry. African regimes have not shown themselves to be particularly tolerant of dissent and contrary opinions. Too often, contrary or challenging views are understood as expressions of disloyalty and subversion. Too many African politicians have excessively thin skins unsuitable for political life. Where they should welcome diversity of opinion and views, they rather treat such diversity of opinion as attempts to undermine their positions. In effect, African political leadership frequently elevates itself to positions of infallibility and popery. Some of them pontificate on everything from what people should eat and drink to how parents should bring up their children. Many African leaders are unable to accept the fact that they can and do make mistakes, and some would even contradict or voice opinions contrary to scientific knowledge and wisdom.

Arbitrary incarceration, state-sponsored terror, torture and assassination are not uncommon in the African post-colonial experience. In countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Sudan, Swaziland, Ghana, Togo and Burkina, there are told and untold histories of political assassinations. Many African countries quietly torture citizens they consider recalcitrant or threatening to their power and rule. Looting of the public exchequer and corruption is rampant on the continent. In this latter respect, there are hardly any exceptions amongst African countries.

Too many African political parties are actually cliques and aggregations of personalities. Political philosophy and ideology are kept on short rations. Dispute and debate in the absence of ideas and philosophically grounded positions degenerate invariably into personalistic squabbles. Political positions are most frequently based on patron-client relations with the clients serving at the beck and call of the political *grande patron*. As early as the beginning of the decade of African independence (i.e. the 1960s), J.S. Coleman wrote that, "*personalismo* (the tendency for political groups to be organized in support of particularly strong personal leaders) is common not only in Latin America where it has flourished for generations, but also in many countries of Africa, the Near East and South and Southeast Asia. One-party systems tend to predominate, although there are important differences in this type …. ".

The political culture which such practices create lend themselves easily to the cultivation of cults of personalities, and symbols of office and power often are expressed in mystical or semi-mystical terms, where, in fact, these positions should be purely bureaucratic. Daniel Arap Moi carried a staff, Kenneth Kaunda was the man with the white handkerchief woven through his fingers, Kamuzu Banda and Jomo Kenyatta carried fly-whisks. Sometimes apppellations and praises follow the train of these leaders. African
populism over the past half century has been particularly prone to accepting crude justifications for unfair electoral and governmental practice on the continent. In the name of “the people” everything becomes possible. Good governance requires firm institutionalization of the social instruments of democratic government. Where the institutions are strong and routinized, personalities are of relatively little significance. Under such conditions, institutions effectively order the political behaviour of incumbents. In this respect, an example is sometimes made of the United States, where the institutions of bourgeois democracy are so well developed that, as it were, any fool or ignoramus can be president without upsetting the fabric of the union or governance.

Good Governance and Human Rights

Good governance goes, hand in hand, with the full acknowledgement and the upholding of human rights. To underwrite these two areas of modern democratic society there is need for the rule of law. Justice must not only be done, but, must also always be seen to be done. Arbitrary arrest and incarceration, without due legal process, is contrary to the spirit of good governance. Guilt has to be proven in court on the basis of law sanctioned and approved by an elected legislative system. Punishment or redress cannot be illogical, idiosyncratic or capricious. Where there is successful multi-partyism, all issues are, practically, out in the open, in the public domain. There are no “sacred cows”, and proper debate of issues is realizable.

It is tragic, when in some cases the state becomes the user of unbridled terror against its own citizenry. In Africa, a number of examples of this can be called into evidence. On both sides of the Angolan civil war, warlordism was given free rein. In the Sudan, where the longest war on the African continent has been fought for almost 50 years, the government has been known to relentlessly bomb its own citizenry. Poison gas has been used in the south of the Sudan against African nationalist insurgents. The Mengistu regime in Ethiopia excelled in the wanton brutalization of its citizenry. Others like the Amin regime in Uganda, the Bokassa government in the Central African Empire, Macias Nguema in Equatorial Guinea provide comparative examples. In Sierra Leone, both government and rebels have terrorized town and country-side. Terror in Liberia is wreaked on the population by the government forces of Charles Taylor. Peace in the Ivory Coast has been broken and the prospect of war looms large. Togo has had the same ruler for over three decades.

In a society, in which the rule of law prevails, citizens should regard rights of everybody else as crucial for the maintenance of their own rights. Conscience and courage are important for the cultivation of a democratic culture and the sustenance of the rule of law. We do well, in this respect, to remember Pastor Martin Niemoller’s of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church’s recantation of the wages of a flabby conscience under Nazi rule. “In Germany, the Nazis first came for the communists, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak up, because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Catholic. Then they came for me... and by that time, there was no one to speak up for anyone.”

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In Pursuit of Democracy

As earlier indicated the record of African countries in the post-colonial era, in as far as the institutionalization of multi-party democracy is concerned, is woeful and disgraceful. Africa broadly passed through three successive stages of governance. The first few years of post-colonialism were generally politically open, African authorities were respectful of human rights and generally maintained a culture of freedom of the press and public expression. Indeed, all of post-colonial Africa started off as states with multi-party systems, which were experientially totally new. This period did not last too long, and in one country after the other was replaced by single-party rule or military dictatorship. Under these systems the rights of citizens were frequently trampled upon. Military rule in Africa, in particular, has been generally brutal and cavalier in its methods. In an earlier study it was pointed out that *coup d’etats* are intra-elitist shifts in the locus of power within the same ruling groups, by insurgents led by soldiers, who narrow the base of the coalition of elites which dominate the ruling classes and control the state as an ascendancy with the cooperation of bureaucratic elites. Martin Meredith informs us that:

In the first two decades of African independence, there were some forty successful coups and countless attempted coups. Dahomey, over a period of ten years, went through six coups, five different constitutions and ten heads of state. Not once was there an occasion when an African government was peacefully voted out of office. In justifying their actions, coup leaders invariably referred to the morass of corruption, mismanagement, tribalism, and other malpractices into which previous regimes had sunk. Only the military, it was said, with their background of discipline and dedication, were in a position to restore national integrity and bring about a return to honest and efficient government.

Those two first decades were the most ‘coup-prone’ of Africa’s post-colonial history. What Lord Hailsham observes, in his autobiography, about Latin America could be easily said about post-independence Africa. Hailsham writes that, “I never can understand why the Spanish American countries seem to oscillate aimlessly between feckless multiparty democracies and thuggish military dictatorship. I fancy it is because they have not learned to separate the office of head of state from the head of government. To my mind military dictators who break their oaths to the constitution and assume the role of head of state and head of government by force of arms are fit only for the firing squad.” The matter about which the judge ventures such intemperate opinion is not actually so mysterious. Where democratic institutions of modernity are weak, economic and social resources are diminishing, corruption and graft rife, and civil society underdeveloped, inarticulate or mute, society becomes unduly prone to superficial and easy rationalities offered as explanations for coups.

About four months after the Armed Forces of Nigeria seized power from the NPN government of Alhaji Shehu Aliyu Shagari (January 1, 1984), the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) held a conference on the State of the Nigerian Economy, at the University of Benin, Benin City (April 1984). In the communique arising from that 1984 Conference titled, *How to Save Nigeria*, ASUU suggested that: “The crisis ... is characterized by chronic shortages of essential goods and services, severe paralysis of industrial production, collapse of infrastructures and services, corruption, stealing, mass unemployment and retrenchment of workers, inflation and a huge foreign and local debt bill.” Abdoulaye Bathily makes the useful observation that: “By democratization we do not mean only political democracy as expressed through multi-party systems as has
become fashionable in Africa recently. Genuine democracy derives from the struggles of an awakened civil society and public opinion expressing their plural and contradictory discourses through a free press." True enough, formal multi-partyism, in itself, is an inadequate recipe for a sustained democratic polity. A whole range of other conditions are, to different degrees, crucial to its sustainability. Also often, in this respect, too much is made of economic growth indices. It takes and needs a multi-dimensional concert of pressures, vigilance and other factors to ensure that the benefits of multi-partyism in bourgeois society can be effectively tapped. Another observer writes that:

Democracy does not generally come these days via a kind of bloody revolution that brought it forth in the United States, but the changes that give it birth often amount to a revolution, and rarely are they made without a great many people risking their comfort, security, wealth, livelihoods and – too often, their lives. …. Democracy is not achieved simply by the hidden process of socioeconomic development bringing a country to a point where it has the necessary “prerequisites” for it. It is not delivered by the grace of some sociological deus ex machina. And neither is it simply the result of the divisions, strategies, tactics, negotiations and settlements of contending elites. Political scientists who conceive of democratic transitions simply in its way miss an important element. That element is struggle, personal risk-taking, mobilization and sustained, imaginative organization on the part of a large number of citizens.

This second period (the 1970s and 1980s) was brought slowly to a close by popular pressures and clamour for democracy and respect for human rights. Over the past ten years popular demand for multi-party democracy in Africa has continued to grow, with pressures for accountability and probity in the exercise of political and civil office. But the limited achievements of the past decade need to be consolidated in a much stronger way. The dangers of political atavism and retrogression back to the scenario of coups and counter-coups are not beyond African realities. The recent overthrow (March 2003) of the Ange Patasse administration in the Central African Republic is a good case in point. So was the period of the brief Guei military government in the Ivory Coast.

Universally, democracy enjoys today, as a political ideal, unrivaled popularity. Its superiority as a governmental form is so overwhelming that even governments which are not particularly given to democratic practice would want at all times to claim democratic credentials. We need however to remember that democracy is not a fixed formula cast in stone. In principle, democracy means the right and the ability of people to elect and reflect their own leadership through open and transparent mechanisms of selection and election. Democracy in our times acknowledges the equality of all people and is based on the principle of “one man one vote”, i.e. a universal adult franchise. This has been the consistent basis for the transition from colonialism to independence or post-colonialism.

Multi-party democratic systems are routinal, so that, election to office is done on a regular basis. But, democracy is not in the details of its social translation the same for all societies. What may be democratic today may in a hundred years’ time be inadequate as democratic practice. In similar fashion, what may be democratic in one country may be a formula, which would be unsuitable in another society. It is worthwhile emphasizing the fact again that democracy must have societal, cultural and historical relevance. It is also therefore an incremental process, which deepens and refines its relevance as time goes on. A point that needs emphasis is that, the notion of democracy is essentially a relative concept, which can be specifically defined only in a given socio-historical context. Moreover, in practical expression, its definitional boundaries relate to the
character and interests of specific groups at a given point in history. Much has been said in the past about Athenian democracy in Classical Greece where slavery was structured within the social system. Until, the civil rights marches of the early sixties changed everything, in Northern Ireland the British maintained an electoral system, which favoured the landed Protestant Anglo-Irish ascendancy, at the expense of the Catholics. In the United States, until very recent decades, democracy as it was understood and applied in that country, kept African-Americans disenfranchised in large areas of the south. If democracy is evolutionary, conceptually relative and historically contextual, what are the general features of democratic organization and how do they apply to the African heritage?

The point has been elsewhere made that, in pre-capitalist Africa, structures like the lineage, clan, ward, ethnicity or their subsets enjoyed significance in the routinization of government and its selection processes. Many gerontocratic institutions such as age-sets incorporated in operation democratic principles, historically relevant to precapitalist society. For example, institutions like the Kgota/Khotla, Pitso, Leshotlo, and Phuthego among the Sotho-Tswana speaking peoples incorporated democratic principles peculiar to precapitalist social formations. The popular western-inspired myth of arbitrary rule in pre-colonial Africa cannot stand up to the test of hard anthropological evidence. Throughout the colonial period, the older significance of these institutions was steadily undermined by the impact of the colonial dispensation. Today while their effects on the organization of social life has been severely weakened, they have not been totally eclipsed, especially among rural and the more tradition-bound communities and areas. Because, such institutions have meaning to large sections of African society they would need in one form or the other to be respected and modernized to meet the challenges of contemporary democracy.

Other points that need to be borne in mind are the facts that, of the forty five odd sub-Saharan states on the continent, not one single one has been successful in maintaining a robust, industrializing and growing economy during the post-colonial period run deep in African societies. Allegiance to state solidarities in many cases are weak, to say the least. Almost all have been racked with problems of ethnicism and localism, to different degrees of intensity, at different points in their post-colonial histories. The problems of ethnicism and localism are mainly caused by the fact that contending elites have invariably resorted to mobilizing localist and ethnic sentiments within mass society in order to support their claims to resources, in states which have been increasingly faced with diminishing state resources. The realities of primordial feelings and attachments towards historical and cultural belongings among the rural folk and the semi-urban populations are fervent. Sometimes such attachments are even stronger, and borne with more zealotry, than sentiments pertaining to the supposedly overarching post-colonial state solidarities. Shrinking resources and contestation about these, plus, the often truncated character of ethnic and cultural groups, (because of the arbitrary nature of state borders) help to heighten tensions within African states. African leadership, in pursuit of the ideal of totally unitary states often regard any expressions of localism or ethno-cultural belongings of people as anathema, which need to be stamped underfoot. In the political language of African elites these are all manifestations of “tribalism”. Azikiwe cautioned against the tendency to easily dismiss the realities of ethnic affiliation in an instructive lecture entitled Tribalism: A Pragmatic Instrument for National Unity.

While the mobilization of narrow ethnic feelings, by elites, for their limited economic and political interests often takes chauvinistic tribalistic forms, it would appear that the way to
contain and counteract tribalistic tendencies is to open up African countries to greater
democratic expression, including allowing cultural and ethnic sentiments structural space
to be expressed democratically, and not stamped underfoot or unrealistically wished
away. Sweeping such sentiments under the carpet, or playing the proverbial ostrich with
such realities, invariably succeeds in only postponing their re-emergence in more
strident, societally virulent and atavistic forms at later stages. Since most, or almost all,
of African ethno-cultural groups straddle or cross several borders, inter-state cooperation
should be directed towards creating democratic institutional forms which allow the
expression of interest across borders without negating the realities of existing states. In
other words, obviously, we would need to allow the development of Pan-African
institutions and understandings, which allow the people of Africa to relate more freely
and democratically across existing borders without necessarily denying the realities of
the present map of Africa. We need an Africa, which by systematic process and
understanding reduces the divisive and stultifying effects of the inherited colonial
borders.\textsuperscript{12}

Underlying the concept of democracy, and transcending its historical specificities, is the
emancipation principle. The emancipation principle runs through all definitions of
democracy and unites the idea across contextual situations. The emancipation process
is the notion that people at the mass and relatively deprived levels of society are being
disencumbered and released from previous conditions of restriction or bondage, and
gaining access and control over conditions and decision-making in matters affecting their
destiny both individually and collectively. Emancipation is thus both incremental and
cumulative. As a process it steadily yields more democracy. One is not suggesting an
undialectical, unilinear evolutionary process of uninterrupted expansion of the basis of
democratic cultures. Unevenness is the substance of history. There are recessions and
setbacks, accelerations and de-accelerations. As we have seen in the record of Africa’s
post-colonial history. However, in the long run, the emancipation process is irresistible.

Whilst democracy is the most valued political system of our times, it is important to point
out that, academics and scholars over the past hundred years have questioned its ability
to withstand scorching scrutiny and analysis. Roberto Michel\textsuperscript{s} questioned its workability
in the light of his idea of the \textit{Iron Law of Oligarchy}. Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto
variously with the their theories of elites doubted the ultimate truth of democratic
institutions. Le Bon’s observations on crowd psychology tested the wisdom of the
masses. While these strictures against democratic theory may continue to have value for
us and provide a critical angle to the democratic ideal, democracy as a principle of
government provides us with the best formula in a world of imperfections.

Frequently anti-democrats, using the excuse that democracy has to be societally,
culturally and historically relevant, try to cut corners and suggest that in Africa because
of the peculiarities of our histories and cultures, should create special systems of
governance which do not necessarily measure up to modern principles of democracy.
Mobuto Sese Seko suggested that, “There are no two Chiefs in an African village”. In
Rawlings’ Ghana, one of his subchopants in order to silence oppositional voices
suggested that in African tradition when the Chief has had the final word all discussions
should come to an end. The fact that we live in a post-traditional society in which the
economic, social, political and cultural lives of people are far beyond the bounds of
traditional practice is conveniently forgotten. For our future as Africans, we need to be
selective about what we keep and what we reject in our historical and cultural heritage.
Indeed, the need for us to value our historical and cultural belongings is very often used as a cover for the maintenance of undemocratic and atavistic political practice. In this day and age, it is not possible to justify anywhere in the world absolutist monarchical rule. The pattern which in one country after the other on all continents has been accepted and acknowledged as the way to wed our traditions with modern political systems, is the principle of a constitutional monarchy, as is the case in Malaysia, Thailand, Britain, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Japan or the Netherlands. That way we are able to have the best features of the old and the new, and do not risk destroying the heritage of time-tested institutions. When societies and ruling groups persist in maintaining outmoded and decrepit political systems in the name of tradition, they expose the whole society to the dangers of cataclysmic change. When people are denied democracy for too long, in the end they seek all or any means to create representative government.

Swaziland is a case in point. Popular pressures in Swaziland for democratic institutional changes have come as one of the latest installments of such social demands at the close of the 20th century and the commencement of the 21st. For years Swazis accepted life under the monarchical structure of government without political parties and properly elected representative government, which would be acceptable to most democratic societies. It has been a type of divine kingship and monarchical rule, which most enlightened people would agree belongs to a by-gone age and could do with serious or radical modernization. In this sense, the Swazi case differs from the constitutional monarchies which exist elsewhere in the world, and also differs from the more constitutionally grounded case of the Basuto. On the African continent, the time-warp in which the Swazi system of government has been caught is unique.

Africa is in a stage of change and flux as it struggles to democratize and introduce multi-party government. Civil society in Africa has come fully round to the understanding that multi-party systems permit human beings to politically and socially live fuller lives. Although they do not, in themselves, put food on the table. As civil society finds back its voice, so also, is democratic culture entrenching its institutional base.

Everywhere in Africa, military and civilian one-party systems have been crumbling over the past decade and a half, giving way to multi-party democratic structures, which are more favoured by mass society and more natural to the political traditions and aspirations of the African people. In this, Africa faces an enormous task in establishing the right conditions for democracy. From a wide and universal human point of view, we note with approval that totalitarian and unrepresentative regimes have crumbled into ruins in Eastern Europe. The pursuit of multi-party democratic forms of social organization has become a popular cause of civil society everywhere in the world, including Africa.

Needless to say, “multi-partyism” has become not only the latest addition to the many meanings “democracy” has centrally acquired since the beginning of post-colonialism in Africa, but also the yardstick with which recent societal developments in Africa are assessed. However, to view developments in the fledging new countries of Africa and the rest of the Third World from an overly formalistic perspective, is to leave out of account, the indispensable will to be tolerant of the political outlook and viewpoint of others. Nobody ever has the monopoly of the truth. The genuine commitment of the African people, particularly at the grassroots of society, to conditions in which there can be equitable and open contest of competing opinions and priorities could hardly have
been demonstrated more eloquently than by the enormous sacrifices that have been made in pursuit of this end by ordinary people everywhere and on the continent at various junctures of their histories, and especially in Southern Africa.

While the will for democratic dispensation undoubtedly exists everywhere in Africa, this is only one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is the desirability of adequate and appropriate institutions, established and respected procedures, accepted conventions and forms of social conduct through which democratic practice can be consistently routinized in the day to day running of a country. An honest commitment to democracy may not bring forth much in a reality where there still are vested interests in control of key instruments of the state, possibly legitimized by corrupted notions of “tradition” and authority. Likewise, the best institutions and operational rules of democratic organization are no more than a mere sham, if politicians do not use them in good faith.

Africa today is undergoing a revolution of rising expectations for democracy. Africa is beginning to enjoy the makings of a vibrant political culture. The people are increasingly becoming untagged. The media is slowly developing and displaying a diversity of frank, lively and open opinion. Confidence is coming to the Fourth Estate. Africans cannot afford to go back to past inhibitions and paralyzing fears. The democratic project on which the slowly emerging new Africa has embarked should be cultivated and protected to ensure that the institutionalization of the democratic process is historically consolidated, beyond any shadow of a doubt. To do this, principled and courageous outlooks are required. A conscious effort needs to be made by all interested parties to nurse and deepen the culture of tolerance and pluralism in all social transactions, and expose any tendencies towards arbitrary and undemocratic approaches.

It is perceptible within the new and young African elite of today a certain resilient desire and the indispensable will to be tolerant of the political outlook or orientation of others. While this tendency is hardly in full bloom, it is clearly in gestation. Within wider society, there appears to be a genuine commitment of the African people to conditions in which there can be equitable and open contest of competing opinions and priorities. This in a sense could hardly have been demonstrated historically more eloquently than by the enormous sacrifices that have been made in pursuit of such liberating ends by ordinary people everywhere on the continent at various stages of their political histories, since the commencement of the struggle for colonial freedom, and the present struggles for democratic consolidation.

Democracy and Development

The question which is often asked is, “will democracy bring us development?” Is there a relation between good governance, democracy and development? Let us understand that development is not the mere construction of skyscrapers, endless roads and airports or hotels. It is also not the sheer statistical increase in Gross Domestic Product and Gross National Product indices. Development must ultimately mean the qualitative and quantitative growth of both the material and non-material fund of resources available to individuals and society for the fuller pursuit of their creative energies. Where development takes place it registers in all areas of social life. In the above sense we cannot seriously suggest that there is meaningful or sustained development taking place in contemporary Africa. For African development to march forward there needs to be the possibility for the free movement of labour and capital across the continent. We need to create institutions which facilitate the accumulation of capital across borders between
individual and groups, so that sizeable investment potentials are created on a pan-
Africanist basis which would enable Africans to become global players in the world
economy.

As earlier argued, democracy does not in itself eradicate poverty and directly promote
development. But it provides the openness of the social process, necessary for the free
and unfettered growth of the potential inherent in any society. Good governance implies
democratic practice. Democratic practice, in turn, is a good basis for even and equitable
development approaches. While democracy does not necessarily translate into
development, it is possible to argue that open democratic societies have a better chance
for equitable development with respect for human rights than authoritarian systems.

With the diversity of cultural and linguistic patterns that we have in Africa, it is necessary,
if good governance is to be realized, to maintain institutions which are pluralistic and
which celebrate diversity; and which regard diversity as a source of societal richness, an
asset, and not features which should be homogenized at all costs or trampled under-foot
in the name of national unity. Tolerance is a key feature in any society keen to maintain
a culture of good governance. Let different cultures, languages, beliefs and religious
confessions co-exist in equality. The relevance and advantage of the multi-party system,
in our times is that, it best permits such co-existence to be maintained.

A key feature of modern democratic society is secularism. It is useful, in order to
maintain the basic freedoms acknowledged in the Universal Declaration of Human
Rights, to enshrine these rights in our constitutions, and also treat religion as a private
affair which must not be imposed by church or state. People should be free to believe or
not believe. Tolerance is the air which democratic society breaths. Secularism is crucial
for modern democracy.

Closing Observations

To suggest that multi-party democracy is good for North Americans, Europeans,
Japanese, Malaysians, Indonesians but not for Africans is to unforgivably underestimate
the intelligence of Africans and abuse their interests. We are moving through the
incunabula of the institutionalization of democratic politics. The longer we postpone the
movement towards fuller democratic practice, the more we push the society into crisis
and danger. As we move deeper into the 21st century Africans would want to have multi-
party democracy practiced not only in their own backyards, but also their neighbours’. In
this day and age, what happens to one country always has an effect on the neighbours.
We cannot therefore have democratic institutions in one country and archaic and
backward institutions in the neighbouring country. The African Union (AU) is showing by
its terms of reference greater appreciation of this than its predecessor the Organization
of African Unity (OAU).

Multi-party democracy is infectious. It has infected South Africa, Botswana (for long),
Kenya very recently, Ghana with caution, Nigeria with serious dangers, Mali with
lingering doubts about its sustainability, Mozambique with bathed breath, Senegal with
jaded panache, Namibia with some tensions below the surface, and Tanzania with
hiccups. The rest, more or less, maintain various types of political charade and
democratic make-believe, otherwise, outright, tin-pot dictatorship. With the post-colonial
or neocolonial state in so many places crumbling before our eyes, the question is, “what
future for democracy and good governance in Africa”.

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In our times, democracy is articulated through the instrumentality of multi-party, routinized periodic elections, conducted through transparent, accountable, free and fair election procedures. The entrenchment of democratic practice is therefore dependent on the extent to which such modalities for the selection and rejection of candidates for office are institutionalized (through time-tested practice). In other words, the more frequently these processes are carried out without hitches, the better democracy is institutionalized. Electoral processes are therefore a very central element of democracy in modern societies. It is a *sine qua non* for a democratic order. But, it is hardly the only condition for the establishment of democratic order. We must guard against the tendency for some to treat the multi-party system as a system in which a ruling group is only safe, or satisfied, if it has all the seats. Equally pernicious is the situation in which as Hailsham counseled,

A majority of 51 per cent of any given group of human beings has just as much to justify the use of compulsion or bribery on the remaining 49 per cent as any monarch or dictator exercising power over a majority under an authoritarian constitution. The divine right of majorities is just as fallacious in conception as the doctrine of the divine right of kings, and although there is a qualified duty of responsible obedience imposed on the governed by either type of constitution there comes theoretical limit beyond which duty can no longer be demanded, and a practical limit beyond which it cannot be enforced.\textsuperscript{13}
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