



Against the Cultural Gap Thesis on Africa's Democratization

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ABSTRACT. The article challenges the cultural gap thesis in Africa's democratization. The thesis argues that democratization in Africa falters because there is a cultural gap in the democratic framework, such as the absence of democrats, i.e., culture, and the subsequent perversion of the democratization process. The argument holds only if there is one single democracy, and therefore, only one acceptable political culture, which is seldom the case. The problem of democracy in Africa is not due to a unique flaw in the African way of life that forecloses the feasibility of sustainable democracy in the continent. It must be that the democratization that is being promoted does not reckon much with the historicity of democracy and the uniqueness of Africa. The paper concludes with some recommendations on how to reclaim democratization and adapt it to African reality as a way of its consolidation.

KEYWORDS. democratization · Africa · cultural gap thesis

INTRODUCTION

There seems to be a widespread assumption “out there” that Africa's democratic transition falters because there is a cultural gap in the transition framework. Such a notion may have informed pessimistic analyses, which predict a chaotic future for Africa's “democratization processes based on the view that Africa is not ‘mature’ for democracy” (Alou 2002, 27). The cultural gap thesis proceeds from the idea that democratic consolidation is largely attainable where there is a democratic political culture, defined as popular beliefs, attitudes and expectations that are receptive and supportive to democracy (Whitehead 2002; Diamond 1999; Lipset 1990; Almond and Verba 1963). On the surface, this seems a very plausible and valid argument because democracy seems better when it is built upon popular consent, which is usually difficult to forge under conditions of deep-seated divisions, capable of engendering negative transformation of identity in the

democratization process (Kymlicka 1996). It is within this context that Africa's democratization is seen to suffer a great deficit at every stage of its political development.

However, the argument can hold only if there is one single and ideal democracy and therefore only one acceptable political culture, which is rarely the case. Rather, there are many democracies, which simultaneously accommodate universality and particularity. The adaptation of democracy to contextual realities makes the difference between consolidated democracies and those afflicted with fluctuating fortunes, especially in Africa. As Whitehead (2002, 268) rightly points out, durable democracies can be regarded as "regimes that have slowly evolved under pressure from their citizens, and that have therefore been adapted both to the structural realities and social expectations of the societies in which they have become established."

Does Africa have a history of democratic political culture? The question is bound to generate many controversies. The tendency among western scholars is to answer the question not in the affirmative, based on the misleading assumption that Africa does not have a democratic past. Such an assumption represents a major disservice to African civilization, which Western scholarship has labored so hard to deconstruct. As would be discussed shortly, this contradicts the facts of history. Admittedly, the democracy project in Africa, defined in its liberal fashion predominant under the so-called third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991), has been full of contradictions, most notably the pervasiveness of choiceless elections (Omotola, 2009). This is not because there is something in the African way of life that forecloses the feasibility of democracy in the continent. If anything, it must be that the democratization process in Africa, as Claude Ake (2000) rightly points out, "is not taking much cognizance of the historicity of democracy and the uniqueness of Africa." This development, which was deliberately fashioned by the agents of democratization (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United States of America), seeks to present democracy in terms of the universal rather than the specific. In this liberal conception, there has been an unprecedented onslaught against the people, the supposed engine and object of democratization, where citizens are conceived and treated as "users, consumers and clients" (Edigheji 2006, 101). This development most often recasts the nature of the social contract between the government and the governed in manners anachronistic to human security (Omotola 2008a, 2008b). It is this politics of alienation that

underscores the universalistic conception of democracy that should be critically reexamined in order to appreciate the deepening crisis and contradictions of democratic transitions in Africa.

Against this backdrop, the paper basically undertakes a critical response to the cultural gap thesis considered to be the neuralgia of Africa's democratization. The main argument of the paper is that political culture, as an explanatory category to the understanding of democratization is fast losing its appeal when confronted with realities, particularly in Africa. It is argued that for a meaningful understanding of democratization in Africa, we need to move beyond the universal conception of democracy, refocusing the searchlight on Africa's historico-political development. This approach helps to lay bare Africa's "history of extraversion" (Bayart 2000), a major issue in the crisis and contradictions of democratization in the continent. The persistent influences of colonial escapades through the nefarious existence of neocolonialism are clear pointers to these perversions. While African leaders who took over political power from the colonialists squandered the opportunities offered by independence to adapt to the inherited structures to African realities, it may not be deliberate after all. This is because the inherited social structures, be they "emergent, transferred or imported," were deeply entrenched (Ekeh 1975, 1980). The implication of this was that African political cultures were lost to colonialism in almost all ramifications (Omotola, 2004a). Whatever may be considered as African culture today, we insist, is not autochthonous and represents at best a perverted version of African culture, if it has any bearing on it at all.

Consequently, a major problem that confronts African scholarships is how to reclaim the concepts of democratization and political culture in a way that captures African realities. This seems the most viable options if the democratization process is to be meaningful in Africa in terms of being people-centered and development-oriented. The path to this lies in recapturing the historicity of African societies. Such a historical excursion is important given its potential to locate the problems of political culture and democratization in Africa within the structure of power politics in the international system. In the final analysis, we submit that Africa seems helpless in the light of the liberal democratic onslaught, hegemonizing liberal democracy as it does. There is a need for a transcendental approach that seeks to contextualize democratization in Africa. These are the problems that this paper critically engages. The methodology is essentially descriptive, historical

and comparative, sourcing its data from books, journals, and online articles.

POLITICAL CULTURE AND DEMOCRATIZATION

The thesis that democratization flourishes well in countries with democratic political culture is longstanding and has gained increasing respectability in recent times. The concept of political culture has been defined as “the set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provides the underlying assumption and rules that govern behavior in the political system” (Pye 1962, 31). For Almond and Verba (1963), political culture connotes “the pattern of individual political orientations, the attitudes towards the political system and its various parts and to the role of self in the political system.” From these definitions, the basic elements of political culture include the degree of social trust or distrust which prevails in society, the general attitude of tolerance and interpersonal cooperation permeating political relations among people, attachment and loyalty of citizens to the national political system, people’s attitudes towards authority, and people’s sense of their rights, powers, and obligations (Babawale 1999, 217, Diamond, 1993: 7). The prominence of these elements determines the prevalent type of political culture in a given political system at any point in time. As Almond and Verba (1963) have shown in their comparative study, political culture can be parochial, where the citizens have little or no knowledge of government activities, let alone participating in them. It can also be a subject political culture, where the citizens have the awareness but do not participate in government activities. Then there is a participant political culture, where the citizens not only have the awareness but also participate well in the political and policy processes of their societies.

Following Almond and Verba’s (1963) conclusion, it is the participant political culture that is most supportive of democratization. By democratization, we mean “a process of establishing, strengthening, or extending the principles, mechanisms and institutions that define a democratic regime” (Osaghae 1999, 7). These principles and institutions include the existence of a democratic constitution and constitutionalism; open and free press; independent judiciary; a vibrant civil society; and the existence of people with a democratic mindset, capable of managing these principles and institutions in line

with democratic ideals. These seem attainable where there is a democratic political culture. But given the difficulty in defining what constitutes democratic culture, Beetham (1994, 168) suggests an alternative path where the focus would be on “what it is not, or what is incompatible with it.”

Diamond (1999, 21) writes that “if the core process of consolidation is legitimation, then it must involve some transformation of political culture.” He was of the view that the viability of third wave democracies is largely contingent upon the trends in public support for democracy, satisfaction with democracy and other political attitudes and values. This suggests that political culture is, after all, not immutable, but capable of changing when confronted with new realities. In his concise review of the vast body of knowledge on democratization in the third world, Kenneth Bauzon (1992) discusses some of the significant factors affecting the stability of democracies. One of such factors, according to him, relates to:

The prevalence of norms and values, as embedded in the country's political culture, that serve as mediating mechanisms between the governors and the governed thus lessening the potential for conflict and enhancing, instead, non-conflictual competition or even collaboration. (Bauzon 1992, 4)

This argument has other advocates, especially the cultural nationalist theorists who argue that liberal democracy is viable only against the background of a single public culture. They argue that social integration in a liberal democracy requires shared norms and beliefs; and that the levels of trust that democratic politics require can be attained only among co-nationals. They also contend that democratic deliberation requires communication transparency, which is possible in turn only within a shared national public culture; and that the economic viability of specifically industrialized liberal democracies requires a single national culture (Abizadeh 2002, 495-509).

Drawing on these propositions, Beetham (1994, 169) argues that “societies divided by clearly defined and historically antagonistic cultural groups will have difficulty in sustaining democracy.” This proposition seems plausible because a measure of national unity is essential for democratic development. This is because for democracy to “survive, grow and thrive in a society, it must be derived from and be inspired by a deeply-rooted culture of popular participation,” which is essential for the empowerment of the people in the politics and policy

processes of their societies (Adedeji 1997, 7). Schedler (2001, 70) also writes that “democracy comes to town, and settles down as ‘the only game in town,’ only if (and as long as) actors decide to play its basic rules. It is as simple as that: no democratic players, no democratic game.”

From the foregoing, there is no gainsaying the relevance of a congruent political culture to the democratic development of any society. However, the problem relates to determining the components of such a democratic culture and whether such could be universalized. As studies and experiences have shown, there are many democracies, resulting in the inevitability of many democratic cultures (Whitehead 1993). Beetham (1994, 170) argues that the crafting of democracy, though with minimum general requirements, must be creatively adapted to local circumstances. The first systematic attempt to demonstrate the linkage between democracy and political culture attests to this reality (Almond and Verba 1963).

THE STATE OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN AFRICA

Objective students of political history will concede that Africa had a rich tradition and civilization that promoted stability in the pre-colonial period (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1963; Omotola, 2004a). A unique feature of African pre-colonial political systems, contrary to western claims, was the tendency towards some democratic practices among the people. In his famous account of African societies, Williams (1989, 160-65) illustrates how the formation of kingdoms and empires led to the development of some theories and principles of traditional constitutional law, which spelled out the fundamental rights of African people. One of such rights directly related to democracy was “the right of the common people to constitute the final source of power” (Nabudere 2005, 19). Moreover, it was the norm rather than the exception to involve the people in the politics and policy processes of their societies through popular assemblies usually in the village or market square. While this was limited in scope, with the right of participation limited to adult males, there was a general feeling that such practices could have blossomed into full-fledged democratic ideas, as paraded today, if the process of state-building had not been interrupted and abruptly eroded by colonialism (Omotola 2004a; Ake 2000; Osaghae 1989; Oliver 1992).

With the onslaught of colonialism, however, Africa's march to constitutional democracy became truncated. Since then, the form and character of democratization across the continent have been anathema to democratic ideals. Colonial powers endeavored in most colonies to introduce some flashes of democratic practices, as was the case in the metropolis. This took the form of constitutional engineering that ultimately resulted in the introduction of electoral rule and the subsequent formation of political parties and multiparty elections. However, this development tends to retard "true" democracy rather than engender it largely due to its inherent contradictions. For example, the franchise that attended the electoral process was unnecessarily too restrictive, limited only to Lagos and Calabar, in the case of Nigeria. The various attempts at constitutional development were also an entirely urban- and elite-driven affair, with little or no input from the people. Worse still, the governor-general retained the veto power throughout the colonial rule, a condition that allowed for the prevalence of rule by law, as against the rule of law (Ihonvbere 2000). By implication, the colonial foundation of democratization in Africa marginalized Africans from the politics and policy processes of their countries so as to promote colonial interests. Kenneth Bauzon (1992, 7) powerfully captures this:

Colonialism per se was undemocratic, whatever form it took. Its political and administrative apparatus was meant for ruling, not as a vehicle of representation. And it was established for the purpose of pursuing colonial policies, not for advancing the interest of the colonized. Contrary to stated aims, colonial administrators did not prepare the colonial people for any meaningful independence and self-government. Instead, elaborate arrangements were made, wittingly or unwittingly, to prepare for the coming phase of neocolonialism.

It is therefore not surprising that the attainment of political independence in the 1960s and 1970s has had limited impact on inherited practices in Africa. Consequently, the democracy project of the immediate post-independence era soon gave way to one-party dictatorship and military authoritarianism across the continent in the name of the search for national unity and development (Mbaku and Saxena, 2004). This marked the beginning of the failure of the promise of independence by the nationalists as the guarantee of freedom and development. The attendant processes of redemocratization, through constitutional conferences and multiparty elections engineered by

popular forces in the 1990s under the so-called third wave of democratization, have equally suffered fluctuating fortunes across the continent.

Contrary to the belief that the rise of multiparty elections means the demise of dictatorship and the beginning of complete political renewal especially in Africa (Hyden and Bratton 1992), African democratization has suffered severe reverses. In most instances, the democratization process has been reduced to the holding of multiparty elections at the expense of the intrinsic quality of electoral governance in terms of competition, representation, participation, and legitimacy. Most often, African elections have become “choiceless” and where some traces of choice exist, it is often a choice between or among contending oppressors (Ake 2000; Chole and Ibrahim 1995; Ibrahim 2003; Lumumba-Kasongo 2005). Yet, most elections have been disputed as was the case in Kenya and Ghana in 1992; some others were aborted as what happened in Togo, Cameroon, Zambia, and Nigeria in 1993, Angola in 1992, and Gambia in 1994. The result is that most African countries are still run by what Lindberg (2006, 123) called “electoral authoritarian regime,” where there is limited or no space for opposition parties and activists to operate. Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja (1997) gives a detailed account of failed and aborted transitions in Africa, involving countries such as Algeria, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Gabon, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Togo, and Zaire. He also identified countries where former rulers were retained such as Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique, or returned to power in subsequent elections as in Benin and Madagascar (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1997).

The reduction of democracy to “token electoralism” (Hutchful 1995, 117) has partly resulted in the malady of democratization in Africa. In the process, the democratization process in Africa has been largely opportunistic, elitist and anti-people, failing in many respect to promote a developmental state and human security (Ake 1996; Edigheji 2006; Omotola 2008a). Instead, democracy has promoted a vicious cycle of violent conflagration in most parts of the continent, with attendant woes such as massive loss of lives and properties of magnificent proportion. This may not be unconnected with the perversions of democratic institutions and structures by those saddled with the task of managing them for sustainable democracy. It is ironic that African democracies largely coexist with high level of disregard for constitutionalism, flagrant abuses of citizens’ rights, and the rule by law, not of law. This results in the fragility of democracy in Africa upon

which all pessimistic postulations or projections are anchored (Alou 2002). The low degree of political institutionalization has been accompanied by the corresponding erosion of vertical and horizontal accountability such that the whole continent is awash with a political culture of corruption (Omotola, 2006c; Smith 2007). Not even the resurgence of oversight institutions, such as the parliament, civil society, and the mass media, among others, has been able to “discipline” the democratization processes and the political actors (Abrahamsen, 2002). Moreover, the proliferation of political parties has hardly expanded the democratic space, as opposition parties remain constant victims of intimidation, harassment, and victimization (Lindberg 2006; Chabal 1998). Why has this been so?

THE CULTURAL GAP THESIS

The attempt to explain the fluctuating fortunes of democratization in Africa has been largely linked to the weak institutionalization of democratic institutions and structures, most notably a democratic political culture. This perception is manifest in notable publications on Africa that tend to see nothing good about the continent generally known as *Afro-pessimism*. Jean-Francois Bayart’s *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (1993) and *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (1999) are prominent examples. So is Daniel Jordan Smith’s *A Political Culture of Corruption* (2007). For these and related scholarship anchored in *Afro-pessimism*, Africa is deeply rooted in the culture of corruption and violence, both of which are inimical to democratic development. Larry Diamond, an influential student of this school of thought poignantly expresses this perception:

There is nothing inevitable about the progress—or stability—of democracy in the world. The intrinsic openness and competitiveness of democracies imply a certain element of fragility, and outside the deeply institutionalized polities of the industrialized West, this fragility has been acute. As a result, those concerned about how countries can move beyond authoritarianism and totalitarianism must also ponder the conditions that permit such movement to endure. (quoted in Bauzon 1992, 5)

Africa falls outside the industrialized west where there is high level of political institutionalization. Indeed, Africa, like many other continents, is a continent of deep contradictions in terms of the institutionalization of politics. Despite the flashes of democratic ideas

earlier alluded to in pre-colonial Africa, there were also cases of institutional decay and state decomposition where traditional rulers (*Emir, Oba* or whatever the title may be called) symbolized the state and embodied all governmental powers—legislative, executive and judicial. In notable African traditional political systems such as the Yoruba kingdom, the traditional rulers were all-powerful, second only to the gods. In this case, it became almost impossible for any meaningful democratic development to take firm roots.

Nzongola-Ntalaja (1997) lends credence to the malfunctioning of democracy in post-independence Africa. Drawing insights from the aborted or failed transitions across the continent, he asserts that there was little commitment to democratization as a process within the political class as a whole, including leaders of democratic opposition. And that both power holders and those seeking to replace them shared a common political culture, one “that puts less emphasis on respect for the democratic process of open debate and transparent decision-making than on deal making among politicians” (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1997, 16). This tendency continues even under the fledgling democratization process in most parts of the continent. A most recent example would be the “aborted” third term agenda in Nigeria, which sought to extend the tenure of office of political executives, particularly President Olusegun Obasanjo, beyond the statutory two terms of four years each. More than anything else, the third term agenda gives an eloquent testimony that Africans, especially those in leadership positions, still have a very long way to go in terms of developing a democratic mindset receptive to democratic principles, including constitutional limits to their tenure of office (Omotola 2006b). The lingering electoral or political crisis in Zimbabwe and Kenya represents another dimension (Omotola, 2008c).

The democracy project in Africa is still far from achieving what Diamond (1999, 65) called “broad and deep legitimation, such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society than any other realistic alternative that they can imagine.” This is what Dankwart Rustow calls “habituation.” Or as Linz puts it, democracy is becoming “the only game in town,” such that “the norms, procedures, and expectations of democracy become so internalized that actors routinely, instinctively conform to the written (and unwritten) rules of the game, even when they conflict and compete intensely” (quoted in Diamond 1999, 65). For Diamond (1999), therefore, a democracy

becomes consolidated to the extent that there is “a shift in political culture.”

Put on the balance, one can see the gulf between democratic theory and practice with particular reference to the political culture in Africa. From this theoretical prism, one can also understand the theoretical and empirical insights that support the cultural gap thesis. At both the elite and mass levels, major actors in Africa's democratization would seem not to have ever demonstrated the kind of “routinized, recurrent and predictable patterns of political behavior” (Diamond, 1999:66) that can engender robust legitimacy and sustainable democracy. Be that as it may, the argument breaks down essentially when confronted with its ahistoricism, neglecting the obfuscating and obstructive roles of external forces across all epochs of Africa's evolution and development. It is to these perversions by externally driven forces and interests that we must turn to for a better illumination of the deepening crisis of democratization in Africa.

AGAINST THE CULTURAL GAP THESIS: DECONSTRUCTING A FALLACY

The history of Africa has been one long emancipatory struggle against all manners of oppression Through it all, it was generally agreed that democracy is not relevant to Africa. These struggles were hardly treated seriously by the outside world, especially the developed market economies which had appropriate democratic legitimacy for their political practices as the emancipatory projects which they were. Nor were they accorded the status of democratic struggles. To the extent that democracy was talked about at all in the African context, it was only to problematise its relevance and to dismiss its possibilities. (Ake 2000, 33)

The above quotation from the late Claude Ake, a foremost political economist, succinctly summarizes the travails of Africa and why its democratization processes have always beamed a contradictory reality of faltering prospects and new hopes. Prior to her contact with the outside world, Africa was known for diverse political systems that suited its societies. By whatever name they may be called, one basic fact, as Basil Davidson (1992, 60-61) has reminded us, was the continuous search for “a unifying force; a system of participation that must not only work, but must be seen to work.” Therefore, it does not necessarily matter whether those societies were “stateless,” “despotic-centralized

or decentralized,” or “uncaptured,” so long as the African people were able to negotiate with their leaders through popular deliberations whenever they gathered at the Assembly usually in the village market square. Good enough, the African people could not only engage their leaders in popular deliberations, but could also exercise some measure of control over them by invoking “the silent force of the popular sanction according to a long-established or well-known usage” (Mandani 2002, 48).

Contrary to western-inspired perspectives, Africa’s contact with the outside world, first through the slave trade and later colonialism and neocolonialism, marked the beginning of her disorientation, dispossession, and disempowerment. Through the massive depopulation of Africa, the continent had already been laid prostrate and powerless by the time the next European onslaught came in the form of colonialism (Onimode 2000). But as it turned out, the colonial experience was much more devastating, heralding the total disarticulation of the ongoing processes of state-building in Africa. From the outset, colonialism never had the intention of nation-building in the continent as this could hinder its “extractive” preoccupation. As such, they had to bring together disparate groups under one political system without recourse to the several forces that divided them. This was aggravated by the divide-and-rule tactic of the colonial state and its heavy reliance on the use of force to enforce law and order. From this colonial foundation, it may therefore be unrealistic, as Ake (2000, 28) has pointed out, to expect democracy not to have “an embattled history to survive,” given the fact that “support for it was rarely ever more than lukewarm and invariably ambivalent, confused and opportunistic, and opposition to it was powerful, resourceful and unrelenting.” As an essentially law and order state, the colonial state had all these attributes throughout its transition to independence and the concomitant processes of constitutional engineering and democratization. This partly explains why the so-called advanced democracies, save for their neocolonial enterprise in another form, i.e., globalization, have very little to export to Africa in terms of democratization. As asserted by Ake (2000, 31):

In Africa’s search for democracy, there is very little in the experience of the established democracies to guide it and a great deal to mislead it. That makes the task of democratization in Africa all the more difficult and the outcome the more uncertain.

Yet, it is ironic that the mainstream literature on democratization has hardly alluded to Africa's colonial experience as the foundation of the crisis. This kind of literature failed to acknowledge the centrality of the deepening contradictions of capitalism in Africa to the fluctuating fortunes of democratization in the continent. Instead, it has focused essentially on elections and governance. It is this deliberate distortion that Kenneth Bauzon describes as "the *ahistorical* but very political character of the mainstream literature" (1992, 8; emphasis in the original).

The deepening contradictions of capitalism manifest in the anarchic state of globalization, where Africa is mainly at the receiving end (Omotola and Enejo, 2009). Notable policy issues include privatization, deregulation and trade liberalization, which have been imposed on African countries even in the face of glaring lack of the necessary requisites of effective takeoff and performance, most notably the decadent state of infrastructures. At the international level, global trade and financial institutions, especially the WTO, IMF and World Bank, do not create a level-playing field for African countries. The appeal to one country, one vote by the WTO could not be more pretentious. Or else, how can one explain the WTO requirement of "harmonization" of domestic laws with WTO trading rules; "weighted voting" in the World Bank/IMF in the shaping of lending requirements and priorities; the imposition of free market principles on a heavily skewed international economic system? The cumulative effect of these measures has been the subordination of African state to the interests of Western-based multinational corporations, if not reducing them into a mere agent of Western governments.

Nevertheless, it may be preposterous to heap all the blames on colonialism and the anarchic globalization. After all, what has Africa been able to do for itself barely five decades after the end of colonization? We concede that African leaders who took over power from the colonialist squandered the opportunities offered by independence to dismantle inherited social structures that were not in tune with local realities. But, as argued elsewhere, the failure may not be deliberate after all. This is because what ended during independence was colonization, not colonialism, the former being a system of domination and exploitation differentiated from the latter only by the fact that it has territorial dimension (Omotola 2004a).

There is also another internal dimension to the problem. This relates to the impact of prolonged military rule in Africa to which the

mainstream literature always refers to. Admittedly, the incursion of the military into African political life has further worsened the problems generated by colonialism. As Ibrahim (1995, 122) illustrates:

The military has impacted on society its anti-social and anti-political values. [It has] permeated civil society with [its] values-both the formal military values of over-centralization and resolution of conflicts through repression and the informal lumpen values associated with the “barrack culture” and the brutality derived from the colonial army.

While there is no gainsaying the validity of the foregoing, one should not lose sight of how the contradictions and exigencies of the Cold War environment put the third world, particularly Africa, at the heart of the two power blocs—West and East. In their struggle for converts, and given the importance of Africa to the Non-Aligned Movement, the two power blocs had to explore all avenues to gain entry into the continent. Most often, this was through unconventional manners, if anything could be so described during the Cold War, including support to authoritarian and military regimes across the continent. Therefore, the prolonged rule of the military in Africa was more of an externally driven contradiction. This could explain the shallow-rootedness of the democratization in the continent (Ibrahim 2003; Omotola 2004e; Lumumba-Kasongo 2005).

We also have to admit that the democratization processes in Africa under the third wave have recorded mixed results. While significant progress has been made in some countries, others leave more to be desired. On the whole, the democracy project has been deficient structurally, institutionally, and behaviorally, as has largely been the case in Nigeria and several other African countries. Nzongola-Ntalaja (1997, 19-20) identifies four of its major obstacles. These are the political immaturity of the democratic forces; the weakness of the means of subsistence of the middle class and its exploitation by the ruling group; the monopoly of the public media by the incumbent regime; and violence against democracy. These weaknesses cannot be completely dissociated from the neoliberal foundations of the democratization process, which tend to equate democracy chiefly with elections and open market economy. This concern is so strong that donor agencies have come to link their development assistance, including debt relief, to being compliant in both respects (Omotola and Saliu, 2009). But, as it has turned out, the democratization process has contributed to the disempowerment of the populace. The

simultaneous transitions in the political and economic spheres have strengthened existing networks of patronage for the consolidation of power by the elite. The result is increasing poverty engendered by the infamous policy of privatization of public enterprises and the erosion of subsidies on essential services (Omotola 2004c). The globalization of democracy in a manner that tends to frustrate the people in the pursuit of their own economic and social well-being, with its undue emphasis on political rights and freedom, questions the very essence and meaning of democracy, especially in the African context. Democracy without a sustainable improvement in the overall well-being of the people is certainly unappealing and can hardly stand the test of time (Omotola 2005; Ake 1996; Bauzon 1992).

RECLAIMING POLITICAL CULTURE AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN AFRICA

No political culture, no matter how high or low, is meaningful and civilized when it does not put at its very foundation the well-being of its people. In the same fashion, democracy becomes irrelevant so long as it disempowers the people, the very object of culture and democratization. Unfortunately, as presently constituted in Africa, both exist in perverted forms, incapacitated as they are to empower the people meaningfully. A major problem that confronts African scholarship and policy makers is basically how to reclaim the concepts of political culture and democratization in a way that captures African realities. This seems the most viable option if the democratization process is to be meaningful in terms of being people-driven and development-oriented. A viable path to this is to recapture the historicity of African societies, which helps to lay bare how the structure of power politics in the international system has continuously crippled the emergence of a democratic developmental state in the continent (Amuwo 2004; Ake 2000, 1996; Bayart 2000).

How can this be done especially given the seeming helplessness of Africa in front of the liberal democratic onslaught ravaging the world? First, Africans at the elite and mass levels must see democracy as the only viable option out of the African predicaments. However, it has to be borne in mind that it should not be just any kind of democracy, but one that is people-driven and development-oriented. To leave the pursuit of this entirely to the “invisible hands” of the free market system might be catastrophic. Agreed that there is no gainsaying the inevitability

and importance of privatization and commercialization of public enterprises, given the colossal failure of Africa's experiment with state-led development, yet, Africa's level of development does not seem good enough to sustain an entirely free market economy. Africa still lags behind in terms of international competitiveness, technology development, and infrastructural development, which are the engines of the current phase of globalization (Mbaku and Saxena 2004). Therefore, there is a need to devise means of bringing the state back into the development agenda. The roles of the state must transcend the borderline of providing the right environment for investment to thrive; it should be involved in the critical sectors of the economy such as agriculture, education, health, and industry in manners that foster democracy and development.

This calls for greater involvement of Africa and of Africans in the global movements against economic inequalities and social injustices. Some notable movements include the 50 Years is Enough, a US network for global economic justice. Its activities include mobilizing and organizing the National Days of Action Against the IMF and World Bank, and conferences, among others. Good enough, Africa seems to be gradually waking up to the reality of this demand. In 2002, the African Social Forum, a coalition of African civil society initiated a popular protest against the nefarious and injurious activities of the IMF in the continent:

Leading the vociferous procession of about 200 were several of Africa's most outspoken critics of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), structural adjustment programmes and the economic ideology the demonstrators called "neo-liberalism." There was Algeria's father of independence, Mr. Ahmed Ben Bella, 84 years old and still energetic. While the spirited protesters danced and sang around him, Mr. Ben Bella shouted, "Today we are going to bury capitalism here in Bamako!"

The march, in early January, came at the culmination of a week-long forum of representatives of more than 200 African social movements, from 45 countries. Held in advance of the late-January World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, it was an occasion for farmers' groups, women's associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade union leaders and intellectuals from across the continent to meet face-to-face, to try to come up with an African perspective on globalization, and reach a consensus on what issues they could raise at the Porto Alegre forum. (Baxter 2002, 18)

It will seem, however, that the most pressing challenge to the democratization process in Africa, which derives largely from the disempowerment of the people, is the pervasiveness of unconstitutional rule. It is ironic that democracy could coexist with the absence of rule of law in Africa, when under normal circumstances it should have been the pillar of democracy. There is no dearth of understanding of this phenomenon. It has to do with the fact that most of the constitutions upon which African countries anchor their democratization were derived through largely fraudulent and undemocratic means. In manners reminiscent of colonial constitutional development, the attempts at constitutional engineering in post-independence Africa have been dominated mainly by the military, which, anti-people as it was, largely excluded the people from the processes. The result, as we have it today, is the illegitimacy of the documents, given their alienation from society. This has been complicated by the pervasiveness of poverty, which ensures that most of the time, people are pre-occupied with the struggle for survival, with little or no time and interest in the constitutional development of their countries (Omotola 2004d; Ihonvbere 2000). This constitutional making process, coupled with the multiplication of pseudodemocrats with little or no democratic mindset, has been responsible for the ineffective execution of the constitution. In some instances, we have seen the attempt of incumbent governments to foster constitutional amendments for personal aggrandizement, as the third term agenda in Nigeria vividly illustrates (Omotola 2006b). Thus, it is important that a genuine process of democratizing the constitutions in much of Africa be initiated and sustained. This requires that the constitution-making processes be made open, transparent, and participatory. This can be achieved if the constitutional review process is deeply rooted in society through popular consultations and public hearings, and where the memoranda from various interests are collected, and the draft constitution is subjected to democratic test through referendum. This is the only option capable of engendering constitutional legitimacy that can boost its execution at all levels.

In the final analysis, we admit that no democracy can survive in isolation, no matter its strengths and resourcefulness. At all levels, there may be a need for some level of conducive international environment. Yet, the role of the international system should be towards creating an enabling environment for democracy to flourish by fostering the emergence of a sustainable, just, equitable and democratic

international order based on social justice. Such an order must blend the universal with the specific, acknowledging and supporting home-grown democratic initiatives, not suppressing and suffocating them out of existence, or hijacking them for selfish motives. While Africa has enjoyed some measure of support from the international system in its democratization, such have not been driven by the aforementioned vision and principle. Rather, western interests have been the drivers of external interventions (Carothers 2000; Diamond 1995).

To be sure, the promotion of western democracy in Africa has been largely counterproductive (Omotola 2008b). This is particularly so given the suffocating conditionalities usually associated with foreign aid. A more dangerous dimension to the democratization process in Africa is the increasing militarization of US-African aid relations. Nothing illustrates this better than the US military's new Africa Command (AFRICOM), which was originally designed to enforce the dominant influence of US policy on the continent. As the Refugees International (2006) submits:

Originally, AFRICOM was promoted as integrating military and civilian agencies for "humanitarian assistance, civic action ... and response to natural disasters." After much criticism from African nations and the international humanitarian community, the new AFRICOM Commander is now emphasizing the value the Command can add to the many U.S. military programs already operating in Africa.

Following this militarization of foreign aid, the US had relocated a substantial portion of its development assistance to the Pentagon. This may have been complicated by the so-called global war against terrorism, which as far as Africa is concerned, compromised both national security and human rights (Omotola 2008c). For example, it has been revealed that:

The rising military role in shaping U.S. global engagement is a challenge to the next president. Foreign assistance represents less than one percent of the federal budget, while defense spending is 20%. The U.S. military has over 1.5 million uniformed active duty employees and over 10,100 civilian employees, while the Department of State has some 6,500 permanent employees. Although several high-level task forces and commissions have emphasized the urgent need to modernize our aid infrastructure and increase sustainable development activities, such assistance is increasingly being overseen by military institutions whose policies are driven by the Global War on Terror, not by the war against

poverty. Between 1998 and 2005, the percentage of Official Development Assistance the Pentagon controlled exploded from 3.5% to nearly 22%, while the percentage controlled by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) shrunk from 65% to 40%. (Refugees International 2006)

It is then left to the democratization forces in Africa to develop the courage and discerning ability to know the kind of foreign assistance they should receive. Whatever the options, however, adequate efforts must be made to strengthen the internal forces of democratization in Africa, while the external forces should play complementary roles, not the drivers.

CONCLUSION

The assumption that democratization in Africa falters because Africa lacks a congruent political culture, though not without some merits, is faulty. This is because it is completely *ahistorical*, failing in its entirety to acknowledge Africa's history of extraversion beginning from the slave trade era through colonialism to the latest phase of anarchic globalization-neocolonialism, all of which has put Africa on the defensive. Due to this, the cultural gap thesis represents a deliberate misreading of the contradictions of democratization in Africa, having failed to take "cognizance of the historicity of democracy and the uniqueness of Africa." For any meaningful understanding of the problems of democratization in Africa, we insist that only a critical extrapolation of the historico-political development of the continent would suffice. This is not, however, to exonerate internal contradictions in African political economy that have added bite to the crisis. In any case, both political culture and democratization are meaningless unless they are properly adapted for the empowerment of the people. The way out for Africa, therefore, is for its scholars and policy makers to recapture these concepts in manners that energize the people. ❀

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