DEMOCRACY in Africa: Fiction or Fact in the 21ST CENTURY*

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Introduction: A Theoretical Overview

It is striking that in the early 1980s barely 20 years or so after African countries were granted home-rule by the colonial powers, I tackled this subject-matter in my research titled, *Democracy in Africa: fact or fallacy*. My conclusion then was that democracy was a fallacy. However, since the collapse of communism in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), I experienced an epiphany of sorts that made me become an apostate to the view that the struggle for democracy and its consolidation in Africa was a will-o-the-wisp. My analysis was also informed by the pressure that was brought to bear on Leaders by civil society organizations and scholars to promote democratic solidity—the contemporary zeitgeist—that has been advanced by the global information revolution. So, I argue today that democracy is a fact and not a fallacy in the continent.

Let it suffice to say that the historical, philosophical and pedagogical trajectory of democracy from antiquity to the present is quite confounding—not least to many students of democracy. This is the case because of the ways in which democracy and its practice have morphed and currently imagined by scholars. For example, while not necessarily opposed to the philosophy of democracy, it is instructive that Plato and Aristotle, as members of the intelligentsia in ancient Greece, and Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Mill and Burke to name a few political philosophers had some misgivings regarding the efficacy of democracy. In short they were not, in the main, enthusiastic about the practice of democracy (i.e. people's or "mob's" rule).

In their discourses on democracy, some equivocated in their opinions on the practicality of democracy as a valid governance technique for a society. Put bluntly, they questioned its soundness in the governance of a polity. This was probably because of the often blinkered character of the trustees of the state who frequently pursued their self-interests above those of the nation-state (Houngnikpo, 2003, pp. 197-210).

In his contemplation on government and democracy, Samuel Huntington averred that democracy did not always produce a desired result since "government produced by elections may be inefficient, corrupt, short-sighted, irresponsible, dominated by special interests, and incapable of adopting policies demanded for the public good [i.e. the good political life for a majority of the population]. These qualities may make such a government undesirable but they do not make it undemocratic (Hunting-ton, 1991, p. 10)." Arguably, Huntington's caricature is spot-on with respect to the character of democracy in much of Africa in the last 50 years or so.

Also, to paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill's dictum "democracy is a problematic system of governance except that humankind has yet to come up with a better model (Udogu, 2010, p. 105)." In any case, the foregoing concise theoretical discourses may be helpful in explaining why an application of democratic principles in the governance of African societies in the past has been so slippery. But why has the democratic consolidation project in African history been topsy-turvy? In view of the current relatively positive democratic trends in Africa, is it possible that democracy is a fact and not a fiction? Answers to the above queries will be tersely addressed within the context of the region's historic antecedent.

Colonial and Post-colonial Africa

The effects of the autocratic colonial governance technique on African leaders have concerned scholars on the democratic progress in the continent. A sketch of the nature of the state bequeathed to African political chiefs at independence is summed up in the following terms:

> [The] colonial state … was a creation of the colonial powers
> for their purpose. As such, it exhibits specific characteristics
> that are not found in the metropolitan state. These are (1) an
> imposition from outside [of their constructed values]; (2) a
> contrivance meant to administer not citizens but colonial peo-
> ples or natives—i.e. to administer not subjects but objects; (3)
> not accountable to those who are administered but to itself
> and ultimately to the metropolitan power; (4) arbitrary use of
> power and lack of transparency; (5) highly extractive, especial-

ly with regard to the peasants; and (6) disregard of all civil liberties in the colony (Mafeje 2002; Uwizeyimana, 2012, p. 146).

My contention is that the preceding genus of governorship inherited by Africa's political captains at the end of colonial rule has endured in post-colonial Africa principally by way of education and political socialization. In other words, it was difficult for African nationalists carefully schooled and socialized in the governance methods of the colonial overseers to suddenly peel off the authoritarian character imbibed during colonial rule. In short, the Western imperial powers governed autocratically but imposed on its successors a liberal democratic constitution and form of government; it was and is an impossible mission, many scholars have argued, for Africa's new leaders who mimicked their colonial administrative ancestors with panache to change. They loved their inherited power and displayed it on their compatriots who were and are expected to treat them with the same quality of respect as they did to the colonial superintendents.

The problems that arose after the granting of home-rule to African states were how to free African leaders from their authoritarian ways, and how to superimpose autocratic rule with the principles of liberal democracy such as: conducting free and fair elections; adhering to the rule of law; protection of minority rights; separation of powers; respecting the due process of law; promoting the existence of more than one political party; implementing an efficacious constitutional document; insisting on government accountability; respecting freedom of the press; and instituting an independent judiciary (Fatton, 1990, pp. 455-473).

The issue confronted by Africa's custodians of the state in adopting the dogmas of liberal democracy has led some scholars to suggest that democracy in Africa was a myth at least during the first 30 years of independence. The problematic nature of democratic development in Africa coupled with the "ignorance" of the new elites and massive ordinary citizens on how to imbibe Western democratic genre led to different forms of experiment.

As long ago as 1982, Richard Sklar, in his presidential address to the 25th annual meeting of the influential African Studies Association, USA, identified five variations of democracy in Africa. These were (1) liberal democracy; (2) guided democracy; (3) social democracy; (4) participatory democracy; and (5) consociational democracy (Sklar, 1982, pp. 12-18). Liberal democracy appears to be the most popular but still problematic in practice.

Democracy: Is it Fiction or Fact?

Within the context of the brief forgoing notional discourses on the political development in Africa a number of scholars—especially Afro-pessimists—have noted their concerns on the democratic trajectory in Africa. First, some Afro-pessimists have pointed to the ubiquity of military coups d'état as obstacles to the consolidation of democracy in the continent. Indeed, military rule literally blanketed the region between the 1960s and 1990s. In several countries, too, coups happened multiple times (see list of coups and coup attempts in Africa, 1946-2004).

Second, Afro-pessimists have also argued that democracy at this juncture in the continent is a fiction. In part, the cynicism expressed by these scholars flows from the truism that post-colonial African leaders constructed nation-states that they ran in a "corporatist" manner in order to further their insular interests and those of their cohorts. In short, these powerful custodians of the nation-state such as the late Felix Houphouet-Boigny of Ivory Coast and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe transformed the nation-state into their private fiefdom; they exploited it for themselves and their lackeys (Udogu, 2010, p. 6). Consequently, the masses see very little reason to promote the political legitimacy of a system that marginalizes them.

Democracy is a Fact

My thesis in this essay is that democracy is a fact in Africa. This hypothesis flows partially from the belief of some Afro-optimists that the introduction of "liberal democracy" into Africa some five decades or so ago marked the beginning of a process that is not unlike the development of democracy in the Occident. My ensuing postulation is grounded on Sorensen's allusions to the fact that the process of imbibing the attributes of democracy, liberal democracy for example, is an incremental process sometimes fraught with missteps. He avers:

The Western countries themselves are examples of the fact that democracy cannot be installed overnight; it is a long term process of gradual change. When quick fixes of imposing multi-party systems, for example, are substituted for the long haul of patiently paving the way for a democratic polity, the result may be that of a thin layer of democratic coating is superimposed upon a system of personal rule without changes in the basic features of the old structure (Sorensen, 1993, p. 53).

Notwithstanding the lessons to be learned from the above citation, there is also the impact of human's lust for power that has frequently led many political leaders to indulge in electoral malfeasance. Undeniably, fixing elections stultifies the democratic consolidation project (Udogu, 2016).

Why is democracy a fact in Africa? It is because it is amenable to Africa. This is true because democracy in its various forms flourished in different regions of the African continent before the arrival of the European powers first to trade and later to colonize it. It is also accurate as Leslie Rubin and Brian Weinstein have noted that owing to ethnocentrism, the colonial hegemonies and many political scientists "failed" to recognize and so refused to distinguish the peculiar genus of democracy practiced in pre-colonial/colonial Africa because what they saw and read about African democratic practices were not identical to, and did not resemble, the system in Europe (Rubin and Weinstein, 1977, p. 8).

A relatively contemporary understanding of the trajectory of democratic solidity in Africa situates its renaissance on two major European events. The first was the tearing down of the Berlin Wall that demarcated Western Europe from Eastern Europe following the end of WWII. The second was the implosion of the USSR that led to the balkanization of this vast Empire. The collapse of communism is a major reason for the democratic revival in Africa. Indeed, it transformed African Marxist-Leninist leaders into "born again" democrats. Immediately following the political tsunami in the Soviet Union, democracy became the vogue globally and African states that resisted this change did so at their own peril—ostracism.

Moreover, it might be useful to sum up the speech of Nigeria's president Muhammadu Buhari at Chatham House, London, in 2015 on the trajectory of

democracy in Africa. He affirmed that before 1989 when most independent African countries were only 29 years old, just four countries held multi-party elections. By 1993, according to Freedom House, the number of electoral democracies rose to 10 and then to 18 by 1995. By the year 2006, the number of electoral democracies catapulted to 24. Strikingly, *New York Times* reported that 42 of the 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa organized and carried out multiparty elections between 1990 and 2002 (Buhari, 2015, p. 3).

Why is it that some scholars and political observers are so bold in predicting that the practice of democracy will remain a fact of life in Africa in this century? How should Africa tackle, as it were, her "two steps forward and three steps back" movement toward democratic consolidation? I maintain that the inspiring tenets of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the Mombasa Declaration and Code of African Leadership, *inter alia*, contain manifestos that will further democratic consolidation in Africa in this millennium. Accordingly, my brief reflections above should validate my thesis that democracy is a fact in 21st century Africa. Be that as it may, I shall allude tersely to some strategies likely to advance the process in my conclusion.

Conclusion: Looking Ahead

Although the struggle for sovereignty from the colonial powers began in the early 1900s by the influential Pan-African Congress and movement, the clamor for self-rule reached its crescendo following the end of WWII (Udogu, 2010, pp. 59-69). After the 1960s a number of African countries were granted self-rule. Some were granted autonomy on a "platter of gold" and others took up arms against the colonizer as in Algeria, Kenya, Mozambique and Angola, for example. In granting sovereignty to their colonies, the colonial overseers imposed their governance methods on their former colonies without adequately educating and preparing the natives to govern their societies democratically.

In Kenya, as in Zambia, a number of British administrators continued with their administrative functions after emancipation simply because these countries lacked sufficient trained manpower at the time of independence (Branch, 2011, p. 39). Thus, the period within which to carefully study and adapt to the European parliamentary system was relatively short; this failure explains partially why democratic development and consolidation in Africa has been wobbly. In some cases political confusions and

wanton corruption in a nation-state have resulted in military interventions thereby aborting the democratic process. Uncertainties in the democratic trajectory since self-government have led some scholars and observers to suggest that the operation of democracy in Africa is a fiction. Other catalysts that augmented political quagmires in Africa are economic woes caused partly by the character of the inadequate and unpatriotic leaders, mismanagement of resources in one of the world's richest regions, and political conflicts. So, how should African states exculpate themselves from the preceding quandaries in order to strengthen and deepen democracy at least within the first half of this millennium? Whereas answers to this query are numerous and vary, I shall briefly examine two overlapping templates. These are Mo Ibrahim's "Index of African Governance (IIAG)" and Robert I. Rotberg's and Rachel M. Gisselquist's "Strengthening African Governance."

Mo Ibrahim, a Sudanese business tycoon, has developed an important index of African governance for measuring and promoting the following dynamics critical for moving the continent forward developmentally and making democracy a fact. These are: 1. safety and rule of law; 2. participation and human rights; 3. sustainable economic opportunity; and 4. human development (Ibrahim, 2015). Coincidentally, Rotberg and Gisselquist in their impressive supervised project on "Strengthening African Governance" made reference, among other things, to Ibrahim's indices (Rotberg and Gisselquist, 2009). Ibrahim and Rotberg/Gisselquist models will be concisely and eclectically examined with a view to providing possible approaches for deepening democracy in Africa and making democratic consolidation a reality in this century.

Rule of Law, Transparency/Accountability, and Corruption

The rule of law, definitionally, refers to a legal framework that accentuates the supremacy of the law and limits the discretionary power of public officials. Additionally, the rule of law safeguards individual rights from the random interference of government and nongovernmental agents and agencies. It provides the basis for democratic constitutionalism (Plano and Greenberg, 1985, p. 23; Fatton, 1995, pp. 67-99). Commonly, it entails a full protection of all forms of human rights including those of ordinary citizens and minorities (Udogu, 2005, p. 180).

Apropos the rule of law, it is critical that the judiciary should be independent and efficient (Rotberg and Gisselquist, 2009, pp. 97-129). Judicial independence implies that the courts and judges must not succumb to the vagaries and control of politicians—especially the president. Very often in African politics judges are beholden to the president and when, as in Ivory Coast for instance, the problem of electoral malfeasance was brought before the court, the judge frequently ruled in favor of the incumbent president (Udogu, 2016). This was so because the chief justice was strategically chosen from the ethnic group of the president. So decision made on the outcome of a rigged political competition in favor of an incumbent president is frequently greeted with skepticism. Thus, it is imperative that judicial independence should be respected and guaranteed in order to further democratic culture and legitimacy.

Although a practice of the rule of law subsumes transparency and accountability, it is worth noting that the lack of transparency and accountability in the activities of governments also nourishes the allure of corruption. Transparency suggests that policies that are made, and their implementation in a polity, are carried out in such a manner that sticks to rules and regulations laid down by the system. Accountability entails, among other factors, the readiness of officials and those in political power to present a report on their stewardship to the public whom they swore to serve whenever such a request is made. The criticality of transparency and accountability in furthering political stability in a polity is a given in democratic theory; yet, many political leaders are reluctant to subject their activities to auditors for fear that their "corrupt practices" could be detected. It is necessary to undertake periodic inspections of accounts of government agencies by experts in order to avoid corruption and to increase support for the system.

Corruption as I have noted elsewhere is an ogre and an impediment to African renaissance (Udogu, 2007, p. 134). Moreover, John Mukum Mbaku has argued that research conducted on this issue in Africa during the last 50 years or so has shown that this "monster" has a significant negative impact on economic growth as well as political development (Mbaku, 2000, pp. 9-54). Furthermore, the extent to which corruption has retarded the progress toward democratic consolidation is manifested in electoral malpractices. If elections are not free and fair because bribery, suppression of

votes of opposition parties, and the balloting process is rigged such a victory by a leader of a party will create national angst and mitigate state's legitimacy; it is precisely the lack of support for a regime from opposition parties that has in part decelerated the pace toward democratic consolidation in Africa. For example, so serious is the issue of corruption in Nigeria that President Muhammadu Buhari stated forcefully: "unless Nigeria kills corruption, corruption will kill Nigeria (Sahara Re-porters, 2015)." Accordingly, he has declared War against Corruption (WAC) in this republic. I suggest that African leaders should emulate President Buhari WAC policy at all levels (local, state and national) of a polity.

Human Development

Human development stresses the importance of education at all levels from the elementary to the tertiary level (Rotberg and Gisselquist, 2009, pp. 221-276). A theory that the more educated a society is the more likely that society will develop is not lost in this contemplation and analysis. Citizens that are well- educated are more likely to demand their rights in a society and to query government policies that are inadequate in the governance of the society and to demand improvement. Educated citizens are more likely to participate in the electoral process than uneducated compatriots—all things being equal. The educated could change the government by voting out of power an inept political leader and replacing him or her (and party) with another party. Educated cadres are savvy in their use of social media to inform and educate others about the political activities in the country and to coordinate ways to change an inefficient system. The use of social media was displayed effectively in the so-called Arab Spring and revolt against the incumbent governments in North Africa—Tunisia and Egypt, for example.

Moreover, statistics suggest that education helps to reduce poverty and to close the gap in inequality in most societies. Once such is the case, it mitigates the possibility of pent-up frustration that could be combustible in a polity. For democratic consolidation to become a fact, human development issues have to be tackled. In the words of Jerry Rawlings, a former president of Ghana, "a starving human being has little interest in the democratic process, unless it also brings with it the fulfillment of his or her basic material needs (Democracy, 1994, p. 15)."

Sustainable Economic Opportunity

Africa is possibly the richest continent in the world because of its abundant un-tapped natural resources. Yet, it ranks behind the other regions of the world. A reason for this, when one controls for the exploitation of the region by European colonial powers, is that the bounties of its raw materials are still to be realized in this century. Whereas the process has already begun, the need for the creation of wealth is crucial (Rotberg and Gisselquist, 2009, pp. 171-218). In this way, the struggle for scare resources will not lead to civil wars amongst ethnic groupings (as in South Sudan) seeking their fair share of the national pie. The eruption of civil war, in the main, extends the political life of an inefficient incumbent regime that claims it can't organize elections because the polity is unstable.

The trajectory toward democratic consolidation demands that the national economy remains sound, and that the activities and clamor of marginalization by ethnic groups and other factions in a nation-state be less centrifugal. Moreover, when politics is not the only game in town because citizens are doing well in business, the political system is strengthened and so peaceful coexistence will provide an enabling environment for democratic consolidation.

In sum, the recipes provided in this brief disquisition for advancing democratic consolidation are impressive. It is equally refreshing to observe that the African Union, civil society groups and policy makers are addressing some aspects of the preceding templates. Their positive actions are gradually making democracy and democratic solidity the zeitgeist and a fact in this millennium.

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* For the full text of this paper please see my chapter in a forthcoming volume, titled *Critical Development Issues in Africa*, by George K. Kieh, Jr.