GLOBALISATION AND THE SEARCH FOR AN AUTHENTIC AFRICAN DEMOCRACY

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Abstract
One major social trend that has accompanied the increasing interconnection of the world is the intensification in the spread of Western modernity. Consequently, the homogenising influence of globalisation has led to increasing similarities in the organisation of governance systems around the world, not the least because of the US policy of democratic promotion and the political conditionality foisted on debtor states by the international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. While Africa and Eastern Europe had experienced a resurgence of democracy particularly in the historical era that is now known as the third wave, the reality is that most of these new democracies are caricatures of the ideal, only exhibiting the form of democracy and lacking in the substance thereof. The overbearing influence of godfathers, manipulations of electoral outcomes, brazen disregard for the rule of law and the prevalence of antagonistic inter-ethnic relations as well as massive corruption among elected public officials seem to demonstrate, as argued by some sceptics that, being inconsistent with indigenous African political traditions, democracy is doomed to failure on the continent. The paper indirectly takes up the challenge of the sceptics by demonstrating that what has failed in Africa is the attempt to globalise the liberal democratic model, which is at odds with the socio-historical realities of post-colonial African societies. In closing, the paper highlights the basic elements which must inform an authentic African democracy.
Keywords: Globalization, Authentic, African, Democracy, Homogenizing

Introduction

One phenomenon that characterised Africa's political landscape in the 90s was the resurgence of democratic forms of government as authoritarian regimes, one after another, were swept out of power by what Samuel P. Huttington described the third wave.[1] Clearly behind these wave of transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule were a constellation of forces which includes: a widespread, mass discontent with the dismal economic performance of authoritarian regimes in Africa, the collapse of communism and the consequent triumph of liberalism, the imposition of political conditionality by the IMF and the World Bank on

debtor nations, the deepening of globalisation accompanied a drive to dismantle the barriers to the mobility of international capital and the emergence of a unipolar world under the leadership of a liberal democratic super-power, namely the US. [2]

With the conjunction of these factors, the emergence of a democracy movement in Africa was only a matter of time. Thus, From Abidjan to the Cotonou there were popular uprisings and constitutional conferences which ultimately culminated in the demise of a host of autocratic regimes and the liberalisation of the political space signalled by the establishment of multi-party electoral systems. By 1999, about a decade into the third wave the number of democracy in Africa has multiplied five-fold, giving the impression that, finally, Africa had become a bastion of democracy.[3]

A critical evaluation of the situation, however, reveals that while some progress has been made in terms of the sheer number of countries holding regular multi-party elections, most of these countries are in the words of Jeff Haynes are "façade democracies." [4] A façade democracy is a caricature of real democracy. In specific terms, facade democracies are characterised by executive lawlessness that is exhibited in brazen disregard for the rule of law, heavily manipulated elections in which moneybags and incumbents deploy massive financial inducement to sway the outcomes, constant harassment and sometimes the elimination of the political opponents, the deliberate emasculation of the civil society. With these anomalies, it is not surprising, therefore, that many of Africa's electoral democracies were not making any progress towards consolidation. Instead, there has been a few cases of democratic reversals as evidenced by coup d'états and the phenomenon of sit-tight leaders.*

It was on the basis of these democratic deficits clearly demonstrated by the anomalies listed above that some scholars have argued that democracy was condemned to failure in Africa because the democratic system is alien to African tradition. This paper challenges the argument that democracy is alien to Africa and demonstrates how globalisation contributes to the crisis of democracy on the continent. More specifically the paper argues that the crisis of democracy in Africa could be traced partly to the wholesale adoption of the liberal form of democracy which is at variance with the socio-cultural realities of most African societies. To undercut this crisis, therefore, the paper provides an outline of principles and ideas which must inform the construction of an authentic African

democracy. To flesh our central argument, this paper is been divided into three segments. The first clarifies the key concepts underlying this discourse, the second analyse how the hegemonic status of Western-styled democracy contributes to the crisis of democracy in post-colonial Africa, while the final segment outlines the element of an authentic African democracy.

Conceptual issues
There are two key essentially-contested concepts that occupy a prominent place in the title of this article, namely, *globalisation* and *democracy*. In what follows an attempt would be made to unpack the meaning(s) of these concepts with the ultimate aim of specifying how they are deployed in this discourse. I begin with globalisation.

Globalisation is arguably the number one buzzword in the contemporary world. Thus, from governmental circles to academic settings and the general public, we are regularly inundated with the use of the word globalisation. As it the case with trendy words, globalisation is not a tightly defined concept. To complicate matters, globalisation is a multidimensional idea, referring at once to a phenomenon, a philosophy and a process.[5] Beyond this, the study of globalisation is cross-disciplinary, examined across fields that are as diverse as cultural studies, sociology, economics, international relations political theory, arts linguistics. As a result of the diverse approaches to the study of globalisation there is no one definition of globalisation that enjoys a universal endorsement. It is for this reason that Blieker declares that "globalisation is an omnipresent and unruly phenomenon; whose manifestation are diverse as its interpretations are contestable."[6]

The complexity of the concept of globalization notwithstanding, some insightful definitions can be garnered from the literature on the subject. Political Scientist David Mittelman defines globalization as the compression of space and time.[7] By this, he meant that the technologies of globalization have reduced the significance of geographical and temporal barriers to cross-border interactions. Anthony Mcgrew and David Held referred to it a "process (or set processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions.[8] In other words, globalisation has transformed social relation from one that was predominantly territorially based to one that is increasingly deterritorialised. Sociologist Anthony Giddens defines globalization as the intensification of worldwide relationships which link distant localities in such a

way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.[9] For our purposes in this paper, we shall conceptualise globalisation as westernisation or the spread of Western modernity. From this perspective, globalisation is defined as a particular form of universalisation, in which the social structures of modernity such capitalism, industrialism, urbanism and individualism are spread around the world, destroying indigenous cultures and self-determination in the process.[10] The import of this definition is that in the interaction of cultures, the Western culture remains hegemonic as it continues to infiltrate and dominate non-Western cultures. Of course, the understanding of globalisation could be faulted on the ground that in equating globalisation with westernisation it fails to recognise that globalisation could follow multiple tracks, whereby different forms of modernity, Western and non-Western could be spreading around the world at the same time. Our response to such an argument would be that if we take a long-term perspective on globalisation, say we go back two hundred years from now, the diffusion of the Western culture seems to be predominant in comparison to the spread of other cultures.

Like globalisation, democracy is an extremely complicated concept, not the least because of the ideological and philosophical disagreements over the very essence and the nature of democratic practice. Given the disagreements over the nature of democracy, it will be impossible to furnish a "fixed and universally acknowledged definition once and for all".[11] Keeping the essential contestability of democracy in the background, we shall examine the ideas of some the thinkers who have tried to specify the meaning of democracy. We must, however, begin our quest to illuminate the nature of democracy with the etymology of the concept. The term democracy is a derivation from two Greek words *demos* and *kratia*, which respectively means "the people and "to rule". Literarily then, democracy means the "rule of the people". The etymological definition, however, fails to capture the nuances of contemporary democratic practice; it does not, for instance, address the thorny question of "who constitute the people?" nor does it specify the nature of the rule as to whether it direct or indirect.

Leaving the etymological meaning aside, what is clear in the literature today is an intense debate between thinkers who approach democracy from a procedural/ minimalist perspective and others who view democracy from a substantive/maximalist perspective. Minimalist democratic theorist such as Joseph Schumpeter, karl Popper and Samuel P. Huntington focuses on procedural aspects of democracy rather than its outcome. The least demanding,

minimalist procedural definition of democracy, according to Handelman focus exclusively on elections, conceptualising democracy as " a political system that holds regular free and contested elections, with near universal adult suffrage on a regular basis.[12] Here is Appadorai's classic minimalist definition: "the system of government under which people exercise their governing power directly or indirectly through their representative periodically elected by themselves."[13] Huntington provides a similar definition. In his words, a system is "democratic to the extent that its most powerful decision makers are selected through honest periodic elections in which the candidate freely competes for the votes and in which all adult population is eligible to vote."[14]

Focusing on minimalist's definition of democracy as competitive multiparty elections possess the advantage of simplifying the process of determining whether a regime is a democracy. The problem with the minimalist understanding of democracy, however, is that it allows illiberal governments to be classified as democratic. On the account of meeting the electoral criterion, current governments in Cameroon, Uganda and Burundi would be regarded as democratic, even when the routinely violate human rights.

Opposed to the minimalist definition of democracy is the maximalist's perspective. According to the maximalists, however, comprehensive, the minimalist definition of democracy is incomplete because the mere fulfilment of procedural requirement, i.e., competitive elections does not necessarily qualify a regime as democracy. To be considered a democracy, beyond organising elections, a regime must in addition "promote human welfare, individual freedom, security, equity, public deliberation and peaceful resolution of conflicts."[15] For the maximalists, therefore, it is not adherence to procedures but the presence of the substance of democracy such as just public policies and fair outcomes that make for a democracy. Edward *et al* offer a definition of democracy that is close to capturing this ideal. To them, democracy is a means of selecting and organising government so that policy represents and respond to citizens' preferences. [16]

The position taken in this paper is that is that the maximalists are right; multiparty elections based as they are on the majoritarian principle may satisfy part of the procedural requirement of democracy. But organising elections is not a necessary condition for democracy, for it possible to conceive of a non-electoral, deliberative democracy nor is it sufficient condition. The world is

replete with dictatorial regimes that manage to organise elections on a regular basis.

Globalisation and the Spread of Liberal Democracy.
The intent of this section is to analyse how globalisation facilitates the spread of Western-style democracy and contributes to the crisis and contradictions of democracy in Africa. In focusing on the impact of globalisation on the quality of democracy in Africa we by no means suggest that there were no internal factors responsible for democratic experiments in Africa but it is underscore the fact that any robust, historically-informed analyses of the spread of liberal democracy must acknowledge the role of international factors such as the colonisation of many African societies by European powers, the democracy promotion programmes by the US and the EU, the imposition of political conditionality on debtor nations by the IMF and The World Bank

Before her contact with colonial powers, Africa was characterised by centralised and highly decentralised polities. Taking the argument that globalisation dates to the first contact with the west as a premise, the claim could be made with justification that liberal or majoritarian democracy was introduced into Africa by the colonial powers. Of course, to admit this fact is not to affirm the patently historically inaccurate claim that pre-colonial Africa was the bastion of oppressive and autocratic rule and that democracy was alien to Africa. No doubt, pre-colonial Africa had its share of autocratic monarchical rule but it also had pockets of democratic practices. A host of Africanist and African philosophers have contributed to our understanding of African democracy by providing detailed accounts of democratic practice in some selected pre-colonial African societies. Edward Wamala, for instance, comprehensively describes how the traditional Buganda society, though monarchical, engaged some principles of democracy in the management of their collective affairs.[17] in the same vein several references have been made to the Igbo of South East Nigeria, who operated a form of republican democracy.[18] Joe Teffo in support of the assertion that traditional Africa was interspersed with democracies writes about communocracy, a form of democracy that characterised African societies such as the Zulu of South Africa, the Buganda of Uganda and the Akan of Ghana.[19]

In the light of the above evidence that traditional Africa was characterised by elements of democratic practice a more accurate depiction of traditional Africa would see it as a mixture of both authoritarian and democratic tendencies. What

globalisation or global processes introduced to Africa, in the wake of decolonisation was a system of Western-style majoritarian democracies that emphasised multiparty elections and civil rights. In less than a decade, however, the version of democracy bequeathed by colonial powers broke down in most of Africa as former revolutionaries turned presidents outlawed multiparty elections, unleashed a reign of terror on their jurisdiction and relapsed into authoritarian rule.

The role of globalisation or global processes in the spread of liberal was clearly more prominent in the around the 90s. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the triumph of the economic and political liberalism, the international climate created an unprecedented opportunity for the Western powers to consolidate their cultural, political and economic dominance in a world that has become a global village. As far back as 1982, President Ronald Reagan announced in a speech to the British parliament that the US will embark on a new programme to promote democracy across the world. The US subsequently established the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) with funds made available by the US Congress.[20] Between 1984 and 1992 NED and Other US agencies had organised democracy promotion programme for not less than 109 countries, comprising of 30 countries in Africa, 24 in Asia and 26 in Latin America and the Caribbean. [21]

Perhaps the more decisive agents for the promotion of liberal democracy are the IMF and the World Bank. These International Financial Institutions' which are heavily influenced by the US and other Western powers, in the 80s imposed the neoliberal economic package known as Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) on financially distressed countries which have been granted, or are interested, in loans. The Structural adjustment programme demanded that adjusting countries devalue their currency, deregulate prices and wages, remove subsidies on basic necessities, as they liberalise, and privatise of state-owned enterprises, etc.[22] In addition to the economic measures listed above, the World Bank introduced political conditionality which demanded that debtor nations deliver on good governance and liberalise their political space.[23] With the introduction of political conditionality, the World Bank joined forces with the US and other international actors to promote democracy around the world. The paradox of democratisation in Africa, however, is that the spread of Western-style liberal democracy has ultimately served to undermine the entrenchment of genuine democracy in

Africa. As Haynes puts it, Africa was experiencing "democratisation without democracy."[24]

The failure of the bid of transnational forces to promote genuine democracies in Africa is due to a number of reasons. In the first, place, the globalised version of democracy, i.e., liberal democracy is incongruent with the socio-cultural peculiarities of Africa's multi-ethnic societies. Liberal democracy emphasises individual liberty on the assumption of an atomistic conception of the human being. From this perspective, the state is conceived as a neutral institution that impartially mediates the conflict of individual claims without any recourse to the conception of the good as defined by various groups.[25] Contrary to the assumptions of liberalism, multi-ethnic African societies hold a communal conception of the individual whose identity and interest are constituted primarily by their ethnic affiliation. Thus, inter-group competition defined along ethnic lines remains a salient feature of politics in Africa. In this context, the state is often mired in inter-ethnic conflicts as each ethnic group seeks to capture the state in order to further its own sectional interest.[26] By stressing the majoritarian principle, liberal democracy fails to undercut the intergroup struggle that tends to characterise multi-ethnic societies. In fact, as Kwasi Wiredu has observed, majoritarian democracy can ossify and deepen the ethnic divisions in Africa by creating a situation in which ethnic minorities are permanently dominated by ethnic majorities.[27] Thus, in the context of Africa's multi-ethnic societies minimalist, majoritarian democracy only serves to legitimate the "tyranny of the majority." [28]

Secondly, the international push for a democracy in the developing world was largely motivated by the selfish interest of the Western powers. Part of the rationale behind the US' support for democratic promotion, for instance, is the need to contain the "expanding threat of communism" or the resurgence of communism after the fall of the Soviet Union.[29] More importantly, it has been argued that the political liberalisation entailed in the spread liberal democracy is aimed at creating congenial political space for the continued exploitation of the developing countries by the capitalist class. In the words of Akin Iwilade,

> The political liberalisation that globalisation promote is really not democracy in the sense that ordinary Africans define it. It is merely a construction of institutions that aid the unfettered extraction of resources; that provide space for minimal but violently intense elite

competition; and confers legitimacy on the state while alienating it from the common people for which it exist.[30]

In other words, the establishment liberal democracy in Africa and other parts of the developing world was meant to spread a veneer of legitimacy on the activities of the neoliberal state whose essential function was to "facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation on the part of both domestic and foreign capital." [31]

Thirdly, given that transnational promoters of democracy, in the first place, were not interested in the entrenchment of popular power, they operated with a minimalist/procedural concept of democracy which only emphasise multi-party electoral competition and abstracts civil rights. It goes without saying that this narrow understanding of democracy which is so vigorously promoted by the international community as a universal idea undermines the search for real democracy in Africa even as it engenders a politics of deception whereby corrupt and power-drunk political elites employ the fig-leaves of manipulated multiparty elections to legitimise what was essentially an authoritarian rule. It is not surprising, therefore, that Africa and the rest of the developing world is populated with polities such as Uganda, Zimbabwe and Burundi which in the words of Lindberg Staffan are run by "electoral authoritarian regimes."[32] Clearly, the prevalence of pseudo-democracies in Africa supports Claude Ake's contention that the North promotes a form of democracy whose relevance to Africa is problematic, one that generates fundamental contradictions that are capable of trivialising or derailing democratisation in Africa.[33]

Apart from the crisis of democracy occasioned by the wholesale adoption of liberal democracy in Africa, globalisation subverts democracy in other ways. The imperatives of economic globalisation tend to generate a politics that is inherently undemocratic. In the bid to fully integrate African countries into the global market, as already noted, they were forced to adopt economic and political reforms prescribed by the World Bank and the IMF. These neoliberal economic policies are however, unpopular because they tend to exacerbate the poverty and inequality extant in financially distressed societies. Thus, these policies, designed by international organisations, over which the domestic populace have no democratic control, have to be coercively imposed. Stephen Gill eloquently underscores this observation in the following words:

> …a pure market system is an utopian abstraction and any attempt to construct it fully would require an immense authoritarian application of power through the state. This would raise doubts about the viability of a minimal or'night-watchman' state, as portrayed in the liberal ideology. Indeed, it can be shown that many of neoliberal forms of state have been authoritarian. In some case, this involved a considerable coercive power to destroy opposition and eliminate the possibility of a third way…[34]

There is an added dimension to the authoritarian influence of neoliberal policies in Africa. The typical neoliberal African state is not only undemocratic, it is also unaccountable. Rather than being responsible and accountable to its domestic constituency, economic globalisation compels the state to be accountable to International Financial Institutions (IFIS) and international creditors, who dictate the direction of economic management. In this connection, not only does globalisation "truncate democracy" but it also "atrophy state sovereignty."[35]

Working in conjunction with the transnational forces highlighted above is a Eurocentric discourse and scholarship which serves to legitimise liberal democracy, while delegitimising and marginalising alternative conceptions of democracy.[36] By couching the definition of democracy in liberal terms, this mainstream scholarship seeks to control the terms of the democracy discourse as well as the framework within we speak or think about democracy.[37]

Towards an Authentic African Democracy
Having highlighted some of the ways by which globalisation contributes to the crisis of democracy in Africa, we now turn to the central task of this paper, which is to shed light on the basic elements which must inform an authentic African democracy. To set the stage, the point needs to be made that Universalists such as Francis Fukuyama who argue that liberal democracy can be reproduced everywhere and traditionalist such Wiredu who contend that democracy will only succeed only if we construct one that solely based on our indigenous traditions are mistaken. The error of the Universalists is the failure to recognise that liberal democracy was an institutional expression of democracy under a specific historico-cultural context, which may be totally inappropriate when exported into a different cultural context. To paraphrase Ake, the fallacy of the Universalist consists in the conflation of liberal democracy with democracy in its generic form.[38] The error of the traditionalist is that in advocating a return to the

past, it fails to take into account Africa's recent history and how this had impacted on our social experience. Vestiges of traditional African culture remain with us just as elements of Western modernity. An authentic African democracy will not only borrow from traditional Africa, it will also draw insights from our current social experience. It is for this reason that this paper does not advocate indigenous democracy but opts for a home-grown democracy. By home-grown democracy, it refers to an attempt to design a model of democracy that is sensitive to the socio-cultural peculiarities of the African society without losing sight of her historical trajectory.

The first element which needs to be incorporated into a truly African democracy is the consensus approach to public decision-making. Consensus building was a prominent characteristic of political relations in most African societies.[39] Rather than arriving at public decision making by majority vote, many African societies engage in deliberation and dialogue with the primary objective of arriving at a consensus over the issue under deliberation. Kwasi Wiredu, for instance, observes that irrespective of their structural characteristics, whether centralised or acephalous, consensus was the hallmark of public decision making in many a traditional African society [40] Clearly the consensus approach to decision-making has some advantage over the majoritarian, or what Colin Farrelly describes as the aggregative, model of decision-making, which is based on the expression of preference through voting[41]. "The winner takes all" principle underpinning the aggregative decision model, fails to the address the concerns of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities within African societies. This partly explains why inter-group relations have failed to improve in most of Africa. Wiredu succinctly captures the point in the following excerpts:

> One of the most persistent causes of political instability in Africa derives from the fact that in ever so many contemporary African states certain ethnic groups have found themselves in the minority both numerically and politically. Under such a system of majoritarian democracy this means that, even with all the safeguard, they will consistently find themselves outside the corridors of power. The frustrations and disaffections with their disruptive consequences for the polity should not have caught anybody by surprise.[42]

With the re-introduction of consensus approach to collective decision-making as a basic plank in the African democratic model, the frustration and disaffections

of minorities would reduce to the barest minimum because collective decisions at the very least would take their positions into account.

The second element, in the light of African recent history, is that we must deliberately embrace the maximalist version of democracy which stresses the idea of just outcome for all. In The practical import of this point is that we would need to de-emphasise the centrality of elections and "create more spaces for direct involvement of citizens in planning for and making decisions that affect their lives.'[43] in this regard, Arthur Larok has suggested that we ought to focus on building and or strengthening village citizen assemblies rather than institutions like Parliaments. Similarly, Ake talks about an assembly of nationalities.[44] Unless we insist on maximalist democracy with very strong democratic credentials, electoralism and proceduralism would only produce a trivialised version of democracy, and distract us from the quest for an authentic African democracy

The third element that must be factored into the design of a truly African democracy are the economic considerations that galvanised Africa's democracy movement in the 90s. Having endured decades of economic mismanagement and severe poverty, the masses became politically assertive and demanded for democracy with the hope that this will result in some measure of economic empowerment. It is for this reason that African democracy must deemphasise abstract political rights and incorporate concrete economic rights. Simply put if African democracy were to reflect the vital interest of its domestic base, it has to be some form of social democracy concerned about the welfare and material upliftment of the *demo*.

Finally, an African democracy must be participatory and not merely representative; it must not privilege elite competition at the expense of mass participation. Liberal democracy's narrow conception of mass participation which is restricted to general elections runs counter to the robust level of mass participation which is required in post-colonial Africa. Given the fact that bad governance is endemic in Africa, active political participation must extend to the inter-election years. In other words, regular plebiscites, say biannually, should be organised to determine whether the government of the day should continue or be removed on the account of its level of performance. This way it becomes clear to the political elite that governance will not be business as usual and that their

continuity in power would depend on their ability to deliver on good governance.

Conclusion

This central concern of this paper has been to demonstrate how globalising forces and processes contribute to the crisis and contradictions of democracy in post-colonial Africa. In particular, we have argued that transnational forces have facilitated the spread of Western-style democracy which is at once incongruent with the socio-cultural realities of African societies and insensitive to their historical trajectories. The adoption of liberal democracy wholesale without regard for the socio-cultural specificity of African societies issues from the mistaken or erroneous assumption that democracy consists in a universal set of principles and institutions that can be exported to, and nurtured into maturity, in any clime and culture. Of course, there is no debating the fact that the core principles of democracy such as liberty, consent of the people and equality remain universal to democracy, the institutional expression of these principles, however, may vary from across cultural contexts. If anything, the lesson that can be drawn from the misadventure of liberal democracy in Africa is that in encouraging mere electoralism and the majoritarian principle, it promotes an enfeebled form of democracy that cannot adequately address the fissiparous cleavages that have tended to characterise Africa's culturally complex societies. Constructing a home-grown democracy presupposes a nuanced understanding of the prevailing socio-cultural and political conditions. Larok, for instance, made a perceptive observation when he argued that to design a true African democracy we must first provide answers to the following pertinent questions: what is the historical background preceding our democracy? What are we responding to? How effective have citizens participated in this practice and finally what and whose knowledge is shaping the course of democratization in Africa? [45] It quite evident that that the wholesale adoption-or imposition- of Western-style democracy is the consequence of a deliberate inattention to these questions. As long as Western agencies and Africa's opportunistic ruling class continues to drive Africa's democratisation, true democracy will elude Africa in perpetuity.

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