

**DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA IN THE CONTEXT OF NEPAD**

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## **DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA IN THE CONTEXT OF NEPAD**

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### **Introduction**

The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) is a product of the initiative taken by four African Presidents: General Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Thabo Mbeki of the Republic of South Africa, Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal and Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria. It reflects the view that the continent's leadership needs to take an accommodative approach to world politics, and to adjust to the realities of neo-liberal globalization that seems to have become triumphant after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the late nineteen eighties. It also acknowledges that this process of accommodation must involve internal political and economic reforms that will be in line with liberal democracy and neo-liberal economics. In other words, it concurs with Francis Fukuyama when he states that, as mankind approached the end of the millenium, the twin crises of authoritarianism and socialist central planning left only one competitor standing in the ring as an ideology of potentially universal validity: *liberal democracy, the doctrine of individual freedom and popular sovereignty*.<sup>1</sup> For Africa to make it into the twenty first century, it must be part and parcel of this universalism, otherwise called neo-liberal globalization.

The dilemma in Africa is that it has not been liberal, and even the proponents of NEPAD and their ardent followers may not be culturally liberal. Individual freedoms have been severely curtailed by the state, and the market has not been free to grow because of a hostile political and cultural environment in which the state has played a mischievous role. Access to external markets so as to earn the revenue needed to support the growth of the home market has been confined to lowly priced raw materials for export. The OECD community of nations has not been very liberal in exporting capital goods and means of production to Africa. Little has been made of comparative advantages, even where they exist in this very illiberal international environment. Technology, manufactured goods and technical know-how have, however, been imported at prices way above those earned from exports, creating a situation of tremendous unequal exchange between Africa and the world market, indebtedness and *structural underdevelopment*.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Fukuyama, (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, Avon Books, p. 42

Taking this historical backdrop into account, NEPAD now seeks to offer a recipe for a quantum leap from underdevelopment to capitalist prosperity in which there is a **partnership** between two key players:

- A competent and liberal democratic state in Africa
- A friendly and “capital providing” world market in which public and private investors will have interests in creating wealth in Africa and eradicating poverty. In league with the fight against poverty is a target of 7% GDP growth rate that will see improvement in infrastructure, human resources development and a focussed fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The end result is a self-reliant and sustainable process of development that effectively fulfills the basic human needs.

Is this a tall order or can it be realized in our life time? What has been the experience of other forms of “partnerships” that Africa has had with the West and how do the new perimeters stated in NEPAD—giving primacy to democratization--provide an alternative framework for greater payoffs to Africa?

Fukuyama distinguishes between liberalism and democracy. Political liberalism has to do with the rule of law: the recognition that certain individual rights and freedoms should lie outside government control. These are the civil, religious and associational rights normally contained in the *Bill of Rights*. Democracy, on the other hand, is the right held universally by all citizens to have a share in political power by participating on the same footing in the making of a government that exercises this power on behalf of the citizens. There are therefore certain procedures and “rules of the game” that make it possible for citizens to make democratic governments. These rules, usually founded on democratic constitutions, are as important as the governments they create.

In its economic manifestation, liberalism has been associated with the right of free economic activity and economic exchange based on private property and markets. In essence, economic liberalism is the idea that the market should operate freely, allocating values and resources in an atmosphere of competition. In the final analysis, the fittest may be the ones who survive in this competition, but this is usually good for innovation in production, capital accumulation and wealth creation in the interest of all.<sup>2</sup>

But the capital accumulation and wealth creation that led to the foundation of colonies in Africa and the exploitation of the colonial peoples could not possibly be seen as a process that created wealth in the interest of Africans. Walter Rodney, Basil Davidson and many other chroniclers of colonial history have spoken in detail of how Europe—or the West for that matter—underdeveloped Africa.<sup>3</sup> The colonial experience was seen as a tragedy, and the wars of national liberation and the rebellions that were waged against colonialism, from the times of Shaka the Zulu to

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<sup>2</sup> Fukuyama, *ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>3</sup> W.Rodney (1973), *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania Publishing House; B. Davidson (1969) *The African Genius*, Boston, Atlantic Monthly Press.

the fall of the apartheid regime to the African National Congress in 1994, produced heroes of African freedom who could not possibly associate any benevolence of the free market with the malevolence of colonial accumulation.

Independence was won, not with the belief that capitalist prosperity would be brought by the free market and political liberalism, but with the faith that nationalists in political power, using the state, would bring development and prosperity for the people. Liberal freedoms, enjoyed in a sea of poverty, would do the people no good. In many of his speeches and writings, Julius Nyerere expressed this view in justifying the one-party state in Africa. He even referred to Westminster type of democracy pajarotively as “football democracy,”<sup>4</sup> and did not then receive much disapproval from the people of Tanzania.

The experience in many African countries during the first decade of independence is that the nationalist state performed the task of development pretty well. Standards of living rose as the state provided more educational and health facilities, and as the frontiers of employment as well as private property were opened to more and more people by the policies of indigenization or Africanization. As part of the expansion of the frontiers of private property, the informal sector grew and challenged the dominance and privileges enjoyed by foreign and comprador capital in Africa’s neo-colonies. But the two frontiers, given the nature of the dependent economies whose structures were hardly changed by independence, could not expand for much longer. Samir Amin analysed these economies as “blocked economies”<sup>5</sup>, going nowhere in terms of development, but extremely exploited by multinational capital and the “chain of foreign indebtedness.”

By the beginning of the second decade, records of good performance by the state started to wane. State power, in the hands of the military or civilian elite, began to be seen as an instrument of the personal enrichment of a few to the detriment of the majority. What Issa Shivji called *the bureaucratic bourgeoisie* had emerged within the state to subvert its developmental role, and to use state power for personal consumption and accumulation of property.<sup>6</sup> Corruption and misuse of power, in ascendance almost everywhere, led to erosion of legitimacy and the increasing militarization of politics, culminating in chronic political instability.<sup>7</sup>

Having been justified on the ground that it would bring development or prosperity for the many, the balance sheet of the one-party system, or political authoritarianism, proved dismal in Africa. Unlike in South East Asia where authoritarianism could be said to have led to development, in Africa authoritarianism had proved the opposite: it had presided over underdevelopment,

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<sup>4</sup> J.K. Nyerere (1968) *Freedom and Socialism*; (1967) *Freedom and Unity* Dar es Salaam, Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> S. Amin (1971) *L’Afrique de L’Ouest Bloquee*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit.

<sup>6</sup> I. Shivji, (1973) *Class Struggles in Tanzania*. New York, Monthly Review Press.

<sup>7</sup> R. First (1970), *The Barrel of A Gun: Political Power and the Coup d’Etat*, London: Allan Lane; P. Anyang’ Nyong’o (1988), “Political Instability and the Prospects for Democracy in Africa,” *Africa Development*, 8(1), 71-86.

conflicts and the growth of misery for the many. By the end of the seventies, the one-party state was largely discredited in many African countries as popular demands for democracy and more open societies increased.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps there were key elements missing in the presidential authoritarian systems in Africa which were present in their Singaporean counterpart to explain why the latter presided over tremendous economic growth in a short period of time while the former failed in their development enterprise. It is not the so-called “Asian values” that explains this: Victor Mallet, in his book, *The Trouble with the Tigers*<sup>9</sup>, has ably put to rest the myth of the Asian values hypothesis. Lee Kuan Yew gives a much more convincing explanation of why and how Singaporean authoritarian rule laid the necessary political and cultural framework for rapid social transformation and economic growth Without the *enlightened leadership* of Lee Kuan Yew himself, and the team of committed and honest people he mobilized and put in charge of the rule of law, the Singaporean leap into modernity would not have taken place.

“Our greatest asset was the trust and confidence of the people...We were careful not to squander this newly gained trust by misgovernment and corruption. We needed this political strength to maximise what we could make of our few assets, a natural world-class harbor sited in a strategic location astride one of the busiest sea-lanes of the world...The other valuable asset we had was our people: hardworking, thrifty, eager to learn. Although divided into several races, we believed a fair and even-handed policy would get them to live peacefully together, especially if such hardships as unemployment were shared equally and not carried mainly by the minority groups (pp.7-8)..Singapore had no natural resources for MNCs to exploit. All it had were hard-working people, good basic infrastructure, **and a government that was determined to be honest and competent.** Our duty was to create a livelihood for 2 million Singaporeans. If MNCs could give our workers employment and teach them technical skills and management know-how, we should bring in the MNCs.

“The second part of my strategy was to create a First World oasis in a Third World Region. This was something Israel could not do because it was at war with its neighbors. If Singapore could establish **First World standards in public and personal security, health, education, telecommunications, transportation, and services**, it would become a base camp for entrepreneurs, engineers, managers, and other professionals who had business to do in the region. This meant we had to train our people and equip them to provide First World standards of service. I believed this was possible, that we could reeducate and reorient our people with the help of schools, trade unions, community centers, and social organizations (p.58)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Anyang' Nyong'o (1987) *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa*, London: Zed Press

<sup>9</sup> V. Mallet (1999) *The Trouble with the Tigers: The Rise and Fall of South-East Asia*, London: Harper Collins Publishers.

<sup>10</sup> Lee Kuan Yew (2000), *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965-2000*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

In other words, the Singaporean success did not simply require a strong state, but a strong, legitimate and performing state, with a political leadership that had the confidence of the people because it had a vision, was honest, hard-working and paid economic dividends in terms of the improvement in the standards of living of the people. It dealt with corruption by not only upholding high moral standards itself, but also “determined enough to deal with all transgressors, and without exception.”<sup>11</sup> Singapore did not look for aid from outside as a necessary condition for its take off: the state created an atmosphere for an investment boom for both domestic and foreign investors. In other words, the answer to bad governance is not to shift the responsibility away from the state to Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations; the answer is to build and sustain a strong, responsible, legitimate, accountable and performing state. Will this state be found in Africa in the era of NEPAD?

### **Africa: confronting the dilemmas of progress since 1990**

Since 1990, African states have been going through diverse political changes. The most dramatic was the collapse of the apartheid regime in the Republic of South Africa, resulting in the election of the African National Congress (ANC) government led by Nelson Mandela in 1994. Much earlier, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia saw his 27 years in power as President and leader of the United National Independent Party of Zambia come to an end as the multi-party elections of October 1991 ushered into power the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) led by Fredrick Chiluba, a trade unionist turned preacher, turned politician and finally turned president with an insatiable appetite for authoritarian rule. Further north, the long awaited political changes in Kenya were thwarted as the one-party regime of Daniel arap Moi managed to maintain power in a controversial multiparty elections of December 1992, with a repeat performance five years later.

In French West Africa, Benin led the way in 1990 with a national conference of what were called *popular living forces* to put aside the Mathew Kerekou marxist regime through elections won by Neciphor Soglo’s democratic alliance. But five years later Kerekou was back in power, a beneficiary of a reasonably competitive electoral process which he had denied his people the many decades he ruled his country with doctrinaire marxism. In Senegal, Leopold Sedar Senghor had long given way to his Prime Minister, Amadou Diouf, in the early eighties, such that the changes of the early 1990s did not much rock the Senegalese political boat. Abdoulaye Wade, the doyen of African opposition politics, capitalised on the changes of electoral laws initiated by Diouf towards the end of the nineties to finally win the presidency after 26 years of struggle.

What seems to be common in almost all African countries that changed from being ruled predominantly by one-party regimes to having elections which put in power new political parties--or reconfirmed the old regimes under a new ‘semi-competitive’

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 163

electoral system—is that these regimes had to confront, and adjust to tremendous pressures for democratic political dispensation. The question to be asked is whether these pressures led to the establishment of democratic regimes or not. If not, why not? The other set of questions to be asked is whether these adjustments to democratic political dispensation have led to any difference in the performance of government in terms of social and economic policies and development. If not, why not?

The answers to these questions are important because the success of the NEPAD initiative presupposes good, capable, responsible and democratic governance in various African countries as a necessary condition for this success. Hence we need to examine the extent to which there is potential for this in Africa, and how obstacles to processes of democratization in Africa can be removed.

### **The Resilience of Authoritarian Regimes**

It has always been argued that it is difficult for authoritarian regimes to give in to pressures for political openings of a democratic nature. Being more or less “closed regimes”, pressures for political openings threaten their staying power and tend to undermine the privileges that political, military and business elites enjoy under such regimes. This may well explain the intransigence of the rulers in Africa to give in to pressures for democratic change, or their cunningness to wear the robes of democrats and reinvent themselves into power even after so-called multi-party elections.

But what, in the first place, do we mean by an *authoritarian regime*?

### **Authoritarian Regimes**

Authoritarian regimes have been heavily studied in Latin America. Guillermo O’Donnell, James Petras, Philippe Schmitter, Peter Evans, Torcuato de Tella and many others<sup>12</sup> have written profusely on Latin American authoritarian regimes, characterizing them mainly as *bureaucratic authoritarian regimes*. Such regimes depend on heavy use of political power at the center of the state where a civilian or military bureaucracy dominates policy as well as decision making. The state, in this regard, allows very little “voice”<sup>13</sup> in the manner in which it runs public affairs, and it justifies its existence on the ground that it is “developmental”, or is a

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<sup>12</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell, P. Schmitter, and L. Whitehead (eds.) (1986) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule; Comparative Perspectives*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; See also books edited by the three scholars in the series by the same publishing firm : *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Latin America*; and *transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*; Torcuato Di Tella, *Latin American Politics: A Theoretical Framework* (1990), Austin: University of Texas Press; James Petras (1969) *Politics and Social Forces in Chilean Development*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

<sup>13</sup> For the concept of “voice”, see Albert Hirschman (1967) *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*. New Haven, Yale University Press.



“provider of peace and security” or is a “protector of the common man” and works in the national interest. In other words, being a do-gooder for society, it needs very little legitimacy except what it does. It is, by and large, accountable to itself first and to the people second.

A bureaucratic authoritarian regime may therefore be populist or technocratic. The Peron regime in Argentina was populist while the successive military regimes in Brazil were technocratic. But while most authoritarian regimes in Latin America have been *bureaucratic*, their counterparts in Africa have largely been *presidential*.<sup>14</sup>

### **Presidential Authoritarian Regimes**

A presidential authoritarian regime is one in which the president is the central entity in the wielding of political power. He wields this power through appointments to the civil service, nominations of candidates for competitive or semi-competitive elections in the one-party or no-party state, control of the armed forces, police and the secret services, dispensation of rewards and punishments, award of national honours and artifacts of privilege, determination of national symbols, distribution of economic, social and other “developmental” goods, and disposal of public assets. While there may be institutions within the state which are charged with some or all of these responsibilities, they are quite often ignored by the President, or they have to seek the “presidential nod” in fulfilling their functions. In the process of privatization in Kenya, for example, presidential powers have been used to ensure that public assets are disposed of in a manner that favour “the politically correct”. In other words, those close to the presidential palace or those who are part of the circuit of presidential prebendal politics. Laws and procedures have been *fudged* to enable the process of looting public assets through privatization to appear *legal*. Hence we have spoken of the process as institutionalizing a *lootocracy* rather than a democracy.<sup>15</sup>

Presidential authoritarian regimes have to be distinguished from civilian or military dictatorships. The Idi Amin regime in Uganda (1971-1979) functioned with little regard to any form of legitimacy, abused human rights wantonly and relied on naked force to keep itself in power. Presidential authoritarian regimes do not behave that way. They tend to invoke popular causes and seek to renew their legitimacy through elections that are quite often non-competitive or semi-competitive. The elections in Zimbabwe in early 2002 were obviously non-competitive as state power was used to ensure that President Mugabe enjoyed enormous advantage over his opponent Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change. But Mugabe was championing an issue very popular with the

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Anyang' Nyong'ó (1989), “The Decline of the Nationalist Coalition and the Rise of Presidential Authoritarianism in Kenya, 1963-1975”, *African Affairs*.

<sup>15</sup> See Anyang' Nyong'o (2000) *The Context of Privatization in Kenya*, Nairobi, Academy Science Publishers.

poor and landless of Zimbabwe: that is, land to the landless. Acquiring land by force from those who were using it productively did not make sense to right thinking people, but Mugabe knew it would win him political support, and he did it through an election and not a presidential decree as a military dictator would.

Likewise, the Sani Abacha regime in Nigeria, Emperor Bokasa's regime in the Central African Republic and Tombalbaye's rule in Chad were all various forms of dictatorships and not presidential authoritarian regimes. Here the presidents ruled by decrees and beheaded those who opposed them with little regard for the rule of law.

Presidential authoritarian regimes do not rule by decrees; dictatorships do. Presidential authoritarian regimes also have more respect for public institutions. They use them, and they may destroy them over time; but they do not wantonly raze them to the ground as dictatorships tend to do when such institutions stand on their way to power, or challenge what they see as their bases of legitimacy. Presidential authoritarian regimes tend to seek to transform social processes and organizations into "tools of presidential legitimacy" within the state.

Since many states in developing countries in Africa are in reality "state-nations" and not "nation-states", the corporate power of the state tends to dominate society, and the discipline of citizens is enforced through various cultural and material means that seek to ensure their loyalty directly to the state rather than through "intermediating civil society organizations." That is why both presidential authoritarian regimes as well as the dictatorships in Africa find civil society organizations uneasy bedfellows in the contest for political power. And that is why, even though NEPAD pays homage to civil society, the very nature of presidential authoritarian political processes may not envisage the involvement of civil society in the conceptualization of NEPAD, let alone its implementation.

Both presidential authoritarian regimes and dictatorships in Africa are averse to dissent, and only suffer political pluralism to the extent that actors run their affairs within the bounds of the "one-party prerequisites" or "presidential pleasure". For example, while civil society organizations may be very sympathetic in supporting some land reform policy in Zimbabwe, and may not necessarily share Robert Mugabe's approach to the issue, the latter would hardly be ready to listen to their alternative views, albeit such views may help Mugabe design a more acceptable policy to the Zimbabwe people. In other words, in presidential authoritarian regimes, the limit to diversity of opinion in public-policy making may quite often prepare the ground for demagogic approach to public policy by presidential power.

While African intellectuals and civil society organizations do share NEPAD's genuine concern to leap frog Africa into modernity through a process of rapid socio-economic transformation, they do not share the faith in and reliance on the benevolence of the NEPAD leadership, the dependence on external financing, and the hurry to implement the program without proper institutional arrangements owned by the African people. Enlightened or benevolent leadership may only be

found in a few African countries; the majority of the leaders may care less about the NEPAD proposals. The proposals may, in fact, even threaten their stay in power. The four presidents currently leading the NEPAD crusade are also the ones most likely to respect their constitutional mandate to be in power for a specified period of time. Hence the institutionalization of the NEPAD needs to be guaranteed while they are still in power if NEPAD is to outlive them. On the other hand, they may have put in place a closely knit system which will only allow “a circulation of elites” within the leadership, making the departure of the incumbent president inconsequential to the fate of the NEPAD. To what extent is this the case?

In the Singapore case, although Lee Kuan Yew acknowledged that they tended to formulate policies within a tightly knit group around his leadership, they were always careful to ensure that their ideas were tested within certain circles of leadership within the business community and civil society. “Debate and criticism would not take place in public but among members of the government behind closed doors”.<sup>16</sup>

While dictatorships tend to survive in power through force or the threat of use of force, presidential authoritarian regimes tend to seek the mandate of the people through regular elections and the pronouncement of popular policies. Such elections are almost always non-competitive or semi-competitive. They are, as it were, *choiceless elections*. Very often they are organized in a corrupt way, with voters being bribed for their votes and those elected deriving their legitimacy from being *loyal* to the president. The so-called patron-client relationship tends to dominate the chain of relationship and loyalty of voters, campaigners, candidates and the government. The policies, further, may not necessarily be implemented; but they remain in the public domain and may enjoy enormous public discourse for purposes of winning, or even manufacturing legitimacy.

In this regard, NEPAD could be such a policy that a club of presidents may espouse for purposes of legitimacy, locally and internationally. This might appear a cynical view, but it is a view that the leaders themselves need to negate in terms of the concrete actions they take from now on in implementing the NEPAD proposals and not simply in speaking about them or popularizing them for purposes of winning legitimacy.

If presidential authoritarian regimes seem so well-knit in terms of “power ownership” and “power control”, how did they begin to unravel in Africa? How were their social bases eroded or somehow dislocated in certain African countries to allow for multi-party elections which have overthrown presidents, brought into the center of power previously excluded elites and somehow promised the people “a new dawn”? Is NEPAD a continental ideological response to these changed political circumstances, or can it actually evoke pressures from below that may compel African leaders to implement it?

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<sup>16</sup> Mallet, *op.cit.*, p. 29

## Presidential Authoritarianism: Resistance and Adjustments

Many years before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989—a factor that now seems to “periodize” the age of authoritarianism from the age of various forms of liberal democratic “openings”—there were diverse forms of popular struggles for democracy, and resistances to authoritarianism in Africa.<sup>17</sup> The struggles took various forms in different places, depending on different social and economic contexts and historical antecedents.

In former *settler or plantation regimes* like Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Cote d’Ivoire, transition from authoritarianism has been more difficult to accomplish without the active and proactive co-operation of the incumbent president. This only happened in the case of South Africa where it can be argued that *enlightened leadership* saw the writing on the wall and pre-empted long drawn political paralysis by accommodating democratic political opening at the expense of losing presidential authoritarian power.<sup>18</sup> With the absence of enlightened political leadership in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Cote d’Ivoire, this transition has been protracted and detrimental to economic growth as the regimes have continued to inspire little confidence in investors and have, by and large, ruled in antagonism to popular pressures for democratization. In Cote d’Ivoire, the apparent accession to power by the Popular Front Party has been accomplished through an election which was *non competitive* in a typical presidential authoritarian regime.

Enlightened leadership has played an important role in adjusting authoritarian presidential rule to democratic openings in other *peasant based economies* like Senegal and Tanzania. In Senegal, there was really no significant popular pressure for democratization to force Leopold Sedar Senghor to leave the Presidency to Abdu Diouf in 1980, and to begin a slow process of accommodating pluralist politics that eventually saw Diouf out of power through elections almost two decades later. In Tanzania Julius Nyerere voluntarily accepted his own failures at economic development through his Ujamaa policies and accepted to bow out of the presidency, allowing multi-party elections to be held even without the popular approval of the Tanzanian people. In both cases, it was the element of enlightened political leadership, no doubt by Africa’s leading *intellectual presidents*, that prepared the way for political pluralism.

In the former settler or plantation regimes, however, the active voice of civil society organizations makes the staying power of the authoritarian presidents tenuous. Sooner or later they must cave in to external pressures for political opening, and

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Anyang’ Nyong’o (ed.) (1987), *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa*, London: Zed Books, 1987, also published as *La Longue Marche Vers La Democratie en Afrique*, Paris: Edition Publisud, 1988.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the account of this by Nelson Mandela (1994) *Long Walk to Freedom: the Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, London, Abacus.  
Henrik Decker (1988) *The last Trek – A new Beginning: The Autobiography of F.W. de Klerk*, Basingstoke, Macmillan.

the regimes tend to renew themselves through the old elites within the president's party, re-inventing themselves as democrats as has happened in the case of Malawi under Bakili Muluzi.

In the *military dictatorships* such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi societies have suffered, for a long period of time, political instability, internal conflicts and displacement of people. In these societies, civil society has either not developed or, where it was developing as in Uganda, military rule scattered and destroyed its economic and social senews, rendering "new benevolent authoritarianism" desirable for reconstituting civil society itself. The Yoweri Museveni regime that has now been in power for sixteen years is benevolently authoritarian and NEPAD is right in placing premium on conflict resolution as a necessary condition for economic take-off in Africa.

Certain African state-nations have also been of strategic importance to western powers, particularly former colonial powers. This has meant that political changes in these countries have been of particular interest to these powers, quite often making the *alliances* developed over time with sitting presidents the determinant factors on the nature and character of change from authoritarianism to democracy. Kenya, Cameroon, Togo, Congo Brazaville and Gabon seem to fall in this category. In Kenya, it is now known that forces within the Conservative and Liberal parties in Great Britain have been very protective of Daniel arap Moi and were doubtful of the ability of the opposition to handle state power competently in 1992. Hence the British High Commissioner in Kenya in 1992 made it very clear to the opposition politicians, well before the multi-party elections in December that year, that Britain would be quite happy to see Moi continue in power while the opposition was well represented in Parliament and "learning how government works" so as to use that knowledge in the future "and not now," he emphasized.<sup>19</sup>

The demands for good democratic governance as a condition for implementing the partnership proposals in NEPAD could easily be overlooked by western governments when it comes to countries regarded as strategic. For example, as long as the Khartoum government continues waging a war against its own people in Southern Sudan, it is doubtful how this government can be a partner to any member of the OECD, let alone belong to the African Union in accordance with the provisions of NEPAD as well as of the *Constitutive Act of the African Union*. Yet western governments are now falling over each other scrambling to have relations with Khartoum as a result of the oil resources discovered in the south. Canada, in particular, should be ashamed of allowing her companies to do oil business with Khartoum, thus providing it with the revenue it uses to kill the southern Sudanese in a war that has claimed close to 3 million lives over the last 40 years. But Canada is not alone in this. Apart from the Canadian firm, Talisman Energy, other western oil companies like Total FinaElf of France, Lundin Oil from Sweden and British

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<sup>19</sup> The author was present at the discussion in the High Commission in April 1992.

Engineering firms have direct interests in providing the oil blood money to Khartoum.

It must also be noted that *globalization* has greatly influenced the timing, speed, and nature of political changes in Africa. In the early nineteen nineties, economic liberalization was held to go hand in hand with political democratization, and the World Bank and the IMF gave both as conditions for financial support for African governments. Governments that were successfully implementing structural adjustment programs, like Jerry Rawlings government in Ghana, were actually given resources, time and space to democratize. Thus Rawlings was able to re-invent himself as a democrat and stand for elections which he won very much with the support and approval of the West. In Uganda, Yoweri Museveni's no-party regime has held two non-competitive elections without any voice of disapproval from the OECD due to the fact that Uganda has been one of the most celebrated implementors of structural adjustment programs in Africa. But in both cases, income inequalities have grown and corruption has re-emerged with a vengeance, making unsustainable the economic growth gains that have been attributed to the SAPs, and underscoring the role of the rule of law as a necessity for social equity and government integrity.

### **African Perceptions of Democracy And the Rule of Law**

How have Africans, however, perceived democracy and the rule of law? What is the idea of democracy by those who have waged tremendous pressure for it? What has been the perception of democracy by those who rule? What is the role of elections in the clamour for democracy? If good governance or the rule of law is a necessary condition for realizing the NEPAD objectives, is democracy part of this good governance the way Africans perceive it?

Under authoritarian regimes and the military or civilian dictatorships, those who wage the war against authoritarianism and political repression see democracy as getting rid of "closed power". Closed power has negated the aspirations of independence. Independence promised a better world; a world of education, health, employment and freedom. Closed power only gives these "developments" to those in power and their supporters.

Democracy therefore means *entering political power* by those who have been left out and oppressed for so long. The politics of those who want to enter political power can therefore be called *the politics of entrism*. It is state power that they are after, because it is state power that they have been denied so that those within the presidential authoritarian regime can enjoy the good that comes with state power. The *politics of exclusion* is the politics of the presidential authoritarian regime; it is also the politics of the military dictator. The *politics of inclusion* is the politics of democracy.

People get excluded on the basis of tribe, clan, region, religion or colour. The politics of entrism and the politics of inclusion as forms of democratic struggle can also lead to those who were formerly excluded starting to exclude the previous political insiders once an election is won and they become the new insiders. Fredrick Chiluba, then leader of the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) in Zambia, won the election in 1991 and removed Kenneth Kaunda of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) from the presidency, a position Kaunda had held for 26 years. Chiluba immediately started to harass Kaunda's people, going to the extent of declaring Kaunda not to be a Zambian citizen since one of his parents had apparently been a Malawian. Chiluba's fear was that Kaunda would possibly stand against him in the following election and, like Kerekou was to do in Benin, perhaps stage a popular come back to power. Chiluba started to change the rules of the game to make it impossible for Kaunda to contest any future elections for his re-entry into political power.

When faced with popular pressure for political opening, those who wield power in presidential authoritarian regimes tend to view democracy mainly as adjustments to the rules of the game so as to allow an organized entry into the political arena by those formerly excluded. In the case of Nigeria, this was done by the military rulers writing a constitution that allowed for only two political parties: one conservative and the other liberal. Nigerians were expected to organize themselves and make political choices *prescribed* by the political insiders. In the case of Zaire under Mobutu, the president organized a *national conference* to which the people were invited to deliberate on a new constitution under terms set by the military rulers. Even the national conferences initiated by *popular living forces* in Benin, Togo and Cameroon were successfully coopted by the insiders, leading only to one success—Benin—but where the ancien regime managed to re-capture power five years after the conference was over.

Thus, from the ruling presidential authoritarian regimes, adjusting to pressures for democracy has largely been an issue of *political engineering* ensuring that political opening, in terms of new entrants into the political arena, goes hand in hand with maintaining the same political economy. Hence, as I have argued elsewhere<sup>20</sup> *electoralism* is not a sufficient condition for either expanding the democratic space or enhancing democracy in an authoritarian regime. It does help to create an atmosphere for expanded political discourse; but left as such, the discourse may only help to legitimize authoritarianism and not undermine its staying power. NEPAD now goes beyond mere political inclusion as an aspect of democratization and gives an economic and social program for democratization. NEPAD assumes thereby, that conservative authoritarianism will give way to democracy through competitive electoral politics.

## **The Persistence of Authoritarianism in Africa**

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<sup>20</sup> See Anyang' Nyongó, (2002) *The Study of African Politics: A critical Appreciation of a heritage*, Nairobi: Bookprint Creative Services.

But why does authoritarianism find it so easy to re-invent itself in the different African countries in spite of a plethora of multiparty elections?

To answer this question, we need to go back to Franz Fanon's arguments in *The Wretched of the Earth*<sup>21</sup> and Rene Dumont's arguments in *False Start in Africa*.<sup>22</sup> While Fanon deals with the *subjective factors* that influence the actions of African nationalists when they assume political power, Rene Dumont looks at the *objective conditions* that were going to inhibit social and political changes in Africa after independence. In both cases, we realize that the subjective and material bases for democracy in Africa were bound to be very problematic.

Subjectively, the *rising middle classes* in Africa were very much attuned to be *conveyor belts* for external interests in the continent in terms of their material tastes, cultural inclinations, intellectual perceptions and identity with their fledgling nations. Objectively, even those elements of the middle class who tried to *be national*—like Nkrumah—would soon find out that the ties that bound the independent states with their former colonial masters could not easily allow another road of development except a neo-colonial one. In external trade, the multinational companies continued to dominate the export economy, reducing the former colonies to continue being providers of raw materials with very little value addition to what was exported. This kind of economy, producing very little surplus, could not generate sufficient revenue to invest in productive sectors that could expand employment opportunities, and hence increase incomes. Subjectively, the ruling elites did not develop a passion for relying on their own human resources; they preferred the use of the expert from abroad. Hence even where there is a high development of human resources as in Kenya, the expert from abroad—World Bank and IMF included—takes the place of the native, and the native votes with his feet as he seeks employment abroad. Singapore developed by exploiting its own human resources; Kenya has failed to develop by misusing or ignoring its own human resources.

It is this vicious cycle that Rene Dumont described and analysed in his book, leading to the conclusion that, short of a complete restructuring of the African economies, poverty would increase and governments—faced with tremendous economic problems—would tend to be more repressive as they continued only to satisfy the interests of the ruling elites tied to metropolitan capital.

This, perhaps, is why NEPAD seems to be first and foremost a “dialogue between the donors and the African leaders” before it becomes a dialogue between the African leaders and the African people they lead. This does not, however, mean that it is wrong in its diagnosis on **what needs to be done to kick start economic growth in Africa**. It is, however not quite explicit **on what needs to be done by**

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<sup>21</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964. First published by Francois Maspero in Paris in 1961 under the title *Les damnés de la terre*.

<sup>22</sup> Rene Dumont, *False Start in Africa*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967. Also originally published in Paris by Francois Maspero under the title *Afrique Noir e est Mal Parti*.



**the leadership and the African people in their involvement together in this process of leap frogging Africa from the Third to the First World** the way Singapore did it. NEPAD proposes the “peer review” mechanism as a way of ensuring that leaders and governments pass the test of good governance from time to time. But the targets and objectives to be met, especially in terms of economic performance, remain general and difficult to apply for strict accountability.

It becomes therefore rather difficult to see how democratic space can be expanded in Africa without, at the same time, initiating rapid economic growth and economic prosperity as necessary conditions for democracy. Rapid economic growth and the expansion of democratic space must somehow go together. Nonetheless, as Kenichi Ohmae, writing on China in an issue of the magazine *Strategy and Business*<sup>23</sup> observes, there is always the tendency to argue, in a rather linear manner, that it might be necessary to win the war against poverty first before paying attention to issues of democracy. He writes:

“I do not believe China should be forced to hold democratic elections, even if that were possible. Its population would vote for leaders who distribute wealth to the poor. But there are still 900 million farmers in China with an average annual income of \$500; distribution of wealth would simply be a synonym, as it is in India, for the distribution of poverty.”

In Africa, likewise, elections have led to the distribution of poverty as elites who “buy their votes to power” seek, once in office, to profit by looting public coffers and implementing policies which are least attuned to fight the war against poverty. The graph of public and private consumption rises so much faster than the graph of public and private savings that there can hardly be a time when domestic savings will provide a firm basis for capital formation in the service of development. Structural corruption—corruption in which the people also seem to benefit from the elites through intricate webs of dependence—may legitimize presidential authoritarianism which in turn seeks to present itself in this setting as *popular authoritarianism*. As the late Hastings Banda of Malawi once admitted to a journalist when asked whether people rightly or wrongly accused him of being a dictator. “Yes,” he concurred, “But I am a dictator that the people choose to put up with.”

### **What then Should be Done to Enhance Democracy in Africa?**

First, democracy should not be understood simply as the *politics of entrism*. Entrism can easily ossify political opening within the terrain of authoritarian politics. Democracy, however, should be understood first and foremost in terms of a process of enhancing *political participation*. Participation of the citizens in the process of government in terms of policy making, decision making, share and distribution of responsibility as well as scarce values. If the level of citizenship is

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<sup>23</sup> Kenichi Ohmae, “How to Profit in China, Inc”, *Strategy and Business*, First Quarter, 2002.

low, participation is not likely to enhance further democratic values of fairness, justice, social solidarity, and the rule of law.

Secondly, the *rule of law* is a cardinal aspect of democracy. In other words, participation should be based on rules of conduct, behaviour and decision making that are not personal, traditional, particularistic or parochial. The rules should be universal and applicable to individuals as citizens and not any other essential categories unless such categories are also arrived at on the basis of certain universal norms. For example, all those who achieve undergraduate degrees are entitled to compete for jobs in the civil service.

Third, democracy is much more than *good governance*. While good governance may be looked at in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness with which government manages public affairs, democracy is about how this management is done through the participation and consent of the people as citizens. Social Democracy goes further; it demands that democratic governance promotes human dignity, encourages social solidarity and ensures the realization of basic needs as citizens seek to improve their lives under an actually existing democratic regime. Thus good governance that creates permanent conditions for inequalities, however effective such a government is, falls short of seeking the ideals of democracy and the demands of social democracy. In NEPAD, there is a desire to go beyond good governance for a new democratic dispensation that will enhance possibilities for the state to achieve social democratic goals under a partnership with the outside world. But can this be done while authoritarian regimes still dot the political map of Africa?

## **Conclusion**

Transitions from authoritarian regimes to democratic ones have not always been easy, nor do they take place in short periods of time. The ease with which they take place depends on diverse circumstances, some historical, others cultural and others economic and political.

The length of time that the transition goes through depends largely on how the old regime is capable of resisting change and adapting to changing circumstances. It also depends on the political strength and mobilizing capacity of the democratic challengers.

In Mexico, the transition from the authoritarian Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI) regime started in 1968 with the student riots that were ruthlessly put down by Luis Echeverria, then interior minister, as the students demanded democratic reforms. A few years later, Echeverria could only stay in power as the President of the Republic by appeasing the restless masses with populist policies. The authoritarian PRI regime, however, remained unchanged as Echeverria's populism bought it some more time in power.

It took almost three decades for the Mexicans to be able to elect a president from one of the opposition parties. This was Vicente Fox of the National Alliance Party (PAN) elected by a broad-based movement that wanted to see PRI out of power.

But Fox could not have been elected had his predecessor, Ernesto Zedillo, not have disobeyed the PRI political power barons in changing the electoral laws to ensure that an open and democratic election was possible. Zedillo did three things:

- He made the National Electoral Commission independent of the executive and the ruling PRI party
- He ensured that the laws would prevent vote rigging and that vote counting would be free of any bias
- He also ascertained that political representation would be fair and nobody would become president with a minority of the popular vote.

In other words, Zedillo made the opposition win the battle over the rules of the electoral game first before they won the votes cast by the people. He established a political culture of fair competition by putting into force rules and laws that would enforce this culture before the people started to enjoy the electoral outcome of this culture.

It is the struggle to build such a culture that authoritarian regimes always resist. It can be seen in the behaviour of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. It can also be seen in the behaviour of Daniel arap Moi in Kenya. Both have resisted any changes in the rules of the game that would make it difficult for the presidential authoritarian system to be relegated to the museum of bad and non-developmental political culture. It all shows that the struggle for democratic rules of the game is as important as the struggle for a democratic political system itself. As long as the rules favour presidential authoritarianism, election after election will be held in one African country after the other but, *plus ca change plus ca rest le meme chose*.

For NEPAD to be embraced by the African people, it must involve internal democratic changes in each African country that makes people have confidence in the leaders implementing NEPAD, and hence own the process itself. It must also be a partnership with the international environment that leads to wealth creation in Africa as a basis for development.

So far all past arrangements in terms of trade, access to foreign markets, foreign aid and foreign investments have not served Africa's need for internal wealth creation and the growth of domestic home markets. That, perhaps, is why the war against poverty has been so difficult to win and why authoritarian regimes have demagogically painted the outside world as the enemy in shifting the responsibility for the people's misery away from themselves.

While bad governance may, indeed, account for Africa's continued underdevelopment, these *domestic problems*—as Dani Nabudere calls them—

have intensified rather than caused the negative developmental experience. Africa's present day problems can be traced to five hundred years of slave trade and colonisation, a hundred years of unequal exchange with the developed world in trade, and fifty years of undemocratic imposition of development models by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF.<sup>24</sup> In making an argument for a new partnership to reverse this past negative experience, an argument for reparations also needs to be made as a redress for these past injustices.

Even under the Lome Conventions and the Cotonou Agreements, ACP-EU partnership presupposed equity in trade relations, improvement in good governance in Africa and development payoffs for the people. In the 25 years between the signature of Lome I in 1975 and the expiry of Lome IV in 1990, the share of ACP exports in European markets fell by half, from nearly 8% to about 3%. The main beneficiaries were other developing countries such as South East Asia which enjoy a level of preferential access to the EU (the Generalised System of Preferences) that is less favourable than under Lome. In other words, "supply constraints" within the ACP countries themselves made them not take full advantage of the preferential arrangements for their exports to the EU markets.

Even supposing that ACP countries were to succeed in improving considerably the performance of their economies, it is now very late to hope to reverse the trend of preference erosion. First, there are the WTO rules which make preferences outdated. But second, there are the "veterinary and quality standards" that national governments in Europe use to keep out agricultural and livestock imports from the ACP to Europe purely to protect European farmers.

NEPAD is now proposing to go beyond "preferences" as a framework for providing partnership in development with the OECD, and arguing for a more comprehensive *Marshall Plan* for Africa. As Adebayo Adedeji recently reminded us, unlike NEPAD—which has been initiated and prepared by the African countries—the Marshall Plan was a joint endeavour of the war-devastated European countries (the recipients) and the United States (the donor) for a period of four to five years. Europe was an industrialised and developed market economy before the war; Africa is still largely agricultural and peripherally industrial. Europe was to rehabilitate what it already had in terms of production capacity, infrastructure and human resources; Africa still needs to build production capacity, infrastructure and to develop human resources through massive public investments in education and health.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> D. Nabudere (1992) "Africa's Development Experience Under the Lome Conventions", in P. Anyang' Nyong'o (ed.), *30 Years of Independence in Africa: the Lost Decades?* Nairobi: Academy Science Publishers.

<sup>25</sup> Adebayo Adedeji (2002), "From the Lagos Plan of Action to the New Partnership for African Development and the Final Act of Lagos to the Constitutive Act: Whither Africa?", *Keynote Address to the African Forum for Envisioning Africa, Focus on NEPAD, Nairobi: African Academy of Sciences, Heinrich Boell Foundation, and Mazingira Institute.*

Mere global economic integration will not do this, hence NEPAD is right in calling for a more deliberate initiative that focuses on the need to eradicate poverty and leap frog Africa into modernity through another version of a Marshall Plan under very different historical circumstances. The only trouble, however, is that NEPAD's Marshall Plan does not seem to have any time frame, nor does it seek to create institutions for its implementation such as the Organization of European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) that were so central to the success of the US-European Marshall Plan.

Are the parties to this partnership serious and committed to the endeavour they have assigned themselves? On the one hand are the proposers of the new Marshall Plan, the African leaders. They argue that they are now committed to good democratic governance, and that those who deviate will be called upon to account for themselves through a **peer review mechanism**. What are the institutional guarantees? They are currently not clear. On the other hand are the OECD partners who have, in the past, insisted on the need for this democratic governance as a condition for economic partnership but have quite often created exceptions where their national interests are at stake.

Whatever uncertainties and problems we have pointed out, we want to believe, first and foremost, that the proponents of NEPAD are serious about their intentions. Secondly, that the difficulties we have pointed out in the political and economic environment should indicate obstacles to be overcome and not necessarily road blocks that make the initiative futile from the word go. Thirdly, in the final analysis, the success of NEPAD will depend on the following:

- The dismantling of presidential authoritarian regimes as enlightened political leadership and democratic social movements win more democratic political dispensation locally and internationally, and institutionalizing the rule of law and citizenship rights.
- The elimination of political conflicts that dissipate human resources, allow natural resources to be plundered and create the opportunity for wasteful military expenditure in defence of so called national security.
- The ability of the state, therefore, to create an attractive environment for investment and capital accumulation, by investing heavily in social and physical infrastructure, and enhancing regional economic and political integration as intended in the African Union.
- The pursuit of global social democracy as the only viable ideological basis for the new partnership proposed, away from the old models of cooperation such as the ACP-EU relationship, or even the WTO arrangements.