

## **RESURGENCE OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS IMPACT ON GOVERNANCE ON AFRICA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The place of democracy as a system of governance in the modern world is bogus. It seems to be the only means of governance that appeals to all and sundry in both the advanced countries as well as the underdeveloped ones. This could be because of the room it gives for people's participation in the restoration, operation and sustenance of government. It is based on this fact that this study intends a survey of the resurgence of democracy in Africa in order to bring out its different stages and their characteristics and proffers suggestions for improvement.

**Keywords:** democracy, governanace, Africa

## INTRODUCTION:

The concept of democracy has become part of the propaganda arsenal in the contemporary world. This propaganda role of democracy rose because of the positive sentiments it evokes in all the people of the world. It is particularly appealing to the oppressed people of the world especially in Africa who are in teeming majority and whose yearning for freedom, equality and justice are daily frustrated. In fact, the propaganda value of democracy is so high that practically, every regime in the world even the most brutal, oppressive and unjust, wishes to justify its actions on democratic ground. Under these circumstances, it becomes difficult to fully understand the meaning of the concept – democracy (Nnoli, 1986:116).

It is based on this premise that the present study on the resurgence of democracy and its impact on governance in Africa are to be carried out under the following headings: theoretical framework, conceptualization, the resurgence of democracy in Africa, the impact of democracy on governance in Africa and recapitulation.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION:

Many of the elements of modern democracy are usually taken to have originated in ancient Greece particularly the city-state of Athens. Drawing inspiration from that implies that democracy means literally the ‘rule by the people’. In addition to its Greek antecedents, modern democracy is also taken to have evolved from such medieval institutions as the British parliament and the jury and from the political theories of the seventeenth century such as equality of women/men, natural rights and sovereignty (Heater, 1964).

However, it has been widely understood that democracy is not an exclusively Greek or western value. This is because recent historical and archaeological researches have shown that some of the basic principles of democracy existed in other civilizations. For instance, the principles of accountability, consensus building and popular participation were important features of many pre-colonial systems of government even in Africa. Therefore, democracy could be said to consist of principles that have universal relevance and multiple sources (Enemuo, 1999).

It is in this light that Heater (1964) regards democracy as a form of government, a way of life or an attitude of mind which is essentially a method or organizing society politically. And that there are five basic elements without which no community can call itself truly democracy namely: equality, sovereignty of the people, respect for human life, the rule of law and liberty of the individual. He further explains that democratic equality implies ‘one man one vote’. Irrespective of differences in wealth, religion, intelligence etc, it also connotes the equal right and opportunity of all citizens to hold political office.

In practice, popular sovereignty is expressed through representation and majority rule. That is, it is through their representative that the people express their will. The representative decides what, in their opinion, the people want, and if their judgment in this is faulty, the people can express their disapproval at the next election or even institute impeachment. Respect for the dignity and worth of the human body and mind is a basic ingredient and requirement for democracy to endure. A democratic government should be based on the rule of law and respect certain basic freedoms for its citizens such as: freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of conscience, freedom of assembly and freedom from arbitrary arrest (Heater, 1964).

In addition, Diamond (1988) conceptualized democracy as meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) either directly or indirectly for the major positions of government power in addition to popular participation in the electoral process and respect for the civil and political rights of the people. But it should be noted that

the existence of numerous political parties and the conduct of elections periodically may not result in popular choice of leadership.

Furthermore, in the course of summation of the varied definitions of democracy, Held (1993) conceptualized democracy in its contemporary form as a cluster of rules and institutions permitting the broader participation of the majority of citizens in the selection of representatives who alone can make political decisions. The cluster include: elected government, free and fair elections in which every citizen's vote has an equal weight, a suffrage which embraces all citizens irrespective of distinctions of race, religion, class, sex and so on, freedom of conscience, information and expression on all public matters broadly defined, the right of all adults to oppose their government and stand for office and the right to form independent associations including social movements, interest groups and political parties.

From the above definitions, it could be deduced that democracy denotes a set of ideals, institutions and processes of governance that allows the broad mass of the people to choose their leaders and guarantees them a broad range of civil rights. Unfortunately, this conception of democracy is narrow for it focused only on formal political rights and process to the exclusion of economic factor. This is because in practical democracies like in Africa, poverty often prevents the mass of the people from actualizing and enjoying their political and civic rights while the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, gives the economically-privileged minority uninterrupted political influence. The recognition of this postulation led to calls for the broadening of the notion of democracy to incorporate social and economic upliftment of the masses (Ake, 1993).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

According to Held (1993), the contending views on democracy reflected in the deeply-rooted conflict about whether democracy should mean some kind of popular power in which citizens are directly engaged in self-government and self-regulation or be conceived as a means of conferring authority on those that are periodically voted into office. This disagreement gave rise to three basic models or theories of democracy, namely:

1. The direct or participatory theory of democracy in which citizens are involved as in ancient Athens,
2. The liberal or representative theory of democracy in which democracy is viewed as a system of rule embracing elected officials who undertake to represent the interest and views of citizens within the framework of rule of law, and
3. The Marxist tradition which is sometimes referred to as people's democracy. The Marxist theory of democracy seeks to extend equality of all citizens from the political to the social and economic spheres of life (Nnoli, 1986:126).

For the purpose of this paper, liberal democracy or representative theory of democracy shall be used as the theoretical framework. This is because liberal democracy has emerged as the dominant model of democracy. In addition, it is usually what people mean nowadays when they speak of democracy, because the first model; the direct popular participation in day-to-day governance is impossible in modern nation-states, all of which consists of millions of citizens and not a few hundreds as was the case in the ancient Greek Polis. Thus, the direct popular democracy has become an ideal which may not be feasible in modern states. Also, whether the Marxist model of democracy should be regarded as valid model has become a subject of contention among scholars. This assertion is based on the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe all of which were based on Marxist ideology and has greatly undermined the arguments of Marxist democracy as a feasible alternative to liberal democracy. In addition, the resurgence of democracy in

Africa is premised on the theory of liberal democracy as introduced by her erstwhile colonial masters. Although, it should be noted that advocates of the foremost liberal democratic model often draw from the elements of direct democracy and the argument of the Marxian tradition (Enemuo, 1999). It is in the light of the importance of democracy that its resurgence in Africa shall be discussed in the following paragraphs.

### **THE RESURGENCE OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA:**

The resurgence of democracy in Africa has a complex and tortuous history. This is because democratization triumph at certain historical conjuncture, but it was blocked and suppressed in other phases. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, three stages in the contemporary resurgence of democracy in Africa are identified: the decolonizing period of guided democratization (the initial wave); the post-colonial period of state capital expansion and authoritarian rule (the inter-wave) and the period of economic crisis which generated pressures for re-democratization (the third wave). The character of the democratic project differs in each period, being structurally related to the underlying forms of accumulation, the level of development of the corresponding civil societies and the nature of social contract and public welfare (Bangura, 1992).

### **THE DECOLONIZING PERIOD OF GUIDED DEMOCRATIZATION:**

Decolonization in much of African countries occurred within the context of guided democratization. After much reluctance, the colonial authorities were forced to embrace democracy as a strategy for maintaining core residual interests. It was envisaged by the colonialists that plural forms of politics would sharpen local differences and dilute the militancy of anti-colonial opposition. Furthermore, the values of individual self-interest were expected to permeate the social environment of the nationalists. The emerging elites on the other hand saw democracy as a strategy to end their subordinate positions in the colonial economy (Bangura, 1992).

Indeed, democratization and decolonization in Africa took place against the background of a poorly developed civil society. Intense struggles has to be waged over the question of making the modern elites and their political parties the vanguard and pathways to self-government rather than the traditional structures of authority which were dominated by the State.

Thus, the struggle for democracy and self-rule in Africa was conducted mainly through the medium of urban-based parties, communal associations and workers' unions. But there was no class-structure because those who participated in the nationalist struggles did so mainly as individuals rather than as representative of corporate organizations (Bangura, 1992).

Also, democratization in this period strengthened the alliance between the emerging elites and the colonial authorities. This facilitated the growth of a nascent local bourgeoisie. Rather than democratize the colonial economy, the nationalist elites in Africa rule through the state monopolies and the colonial patronage networks to consolidate and expand their economic and political power. For instance, the regional marketing boards in the run-up to independence led to the transfer of accumulated peasant surplus into the hands of competing politicians and business groups (Osoba, 1988).

Indeed, decolonization did not fully establish democratic rule in Africa even though the period stands as a major landmark in democratic experiments in the continents.

### **STATE CAPITAL EXPANSION AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE:**

The first decade and half of independence were remarkable in Africa for the emergence of a

model of accumulation that questioned the limited advances in democratization. Elaborate strategies were formulated by the new rulers, donor agencies and the World Bank to accelerate the pace of development. The basic model was influenced by the dominant Keynesian-oriented paradigm in development economic, which stressed the need for state intervention to correct market failures and stimulate the process of industrialization (Taylor, 1989). Based on this model, states in Africa use the proceeds of peasant surplus and rents from extractive industries to finance regimes of import-substitution industrialization. Where such surpluses were not enough, donor agencies and private foreign capital provided the extra finance. The state also offers a package of incentives to foreign enterprises, subsidized the growth of local capital and transforms the petty commodity sector. Social expenditure projects were launched to provide basic infrastructure for development and to sustain the loyalty of the subordinate groups of the anti-colonial alliance. This made the fledgling business groups to ultimately appropriate a large chunk of the resources of such projects for their own development (Bangara, 1992).

Based on this fact, democracy was seen by the new African rulers and emerging local entrepreneurs as obstructive of both corporate and private accumulation. It also encouraged demands for large-scale distribution of resources as opposed to production, and forced rules of entrepreneurs to be accountable to wider populace for the way they handled public resources. It was also felt that democracy would facilitate ethnic polarization at the expense of national unity. Therefore, military and one-party dictatorships were defended as necessary political arrangements for nation-building and economic development (Anyag' Nyongo, 1988). The pathologies of African autocracy were illustrated by the embarrassing attention by the most extreme class: Idi Amin in Uganda, Jean-Bedel Bokassas in Central African Republic and Francisco Macias Nguema in Equatorial Guinean, Mathew Kerekou in Benin Republic, Ghadafi in Libya among others.

Several ideologies ranging from African socialism and humanism to negritude and authenticity were propagated by the new rulers to control dissent and project African societies as homogenous. The logical growth of civil society such as the expansion of unions, professional associations and interest group organizations that were created was seen as a threat to economic development and private accumulation. Therefore, one-party regimes with 'socialist orientation' simply co-opted some of the popular organizations into the party structures and floated alternative organizations at various levels of society to check the development of new autonomous organizations. Such practices were common in Guinea under Sekou Toure, Ghana under Nkrumah, Tanzania under Nyerere.

Other less-ideological one-party States imposed restrictions on the activities of the unions and associations, co-opted the leadership of popular organizations into policy-making institutions and strengthened patron-client relations with traditional authority. Sierra-Leone, Kenya, Malawi, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal (before the democratic reforms) and Cameroon fall under this category. Military regimes such as those of Zaire, Nigeria, Togo, Niger, Mali tended to follow the practice of the latter although some like Nigeria were relatively less-successful in controlling dissent and co-opting popular organizations. Thus, the relative openness of political life that flourished under decolonization was severely curtailed in most countries during the period (Bangara, 1992). But three important cases of democratization occurred in this interwave period: Ghana (1969 and 1979), Nigeria (1979) and Sudan (1965 and 1986). Their failure reinforced the conviction both in and out of Africa that democracy was an improbable, if not impossible dream for the continent of Africa (Young, 1999).

## **ECONOMIC CRISIS AND PRESURES FOR RE-DEMOCRATIZATION:**

The stage was set for the third wave of democratization to sweep over Africa beginning in



1989. And series of dramatic events, internal and external sparked this moment of enthusiasm at the beginning of the 1990s. The series of riots in Algeria in 1988 were an early omen shredding the revolutionary mystique of the Front de Liberation National (FLN) and also forcing the doors of political competition although the transition was aborted in 1992. Also, in 1989, the long-term ruler of Benin and sometime Afro-Marxist Mathieu Kerekou was at bay. He was unable to meet the State payroll or obtain external credits abandoned by his former clientele and faced with series of street protests and a barrage of denunciation from intellectuals, teachers, functionaries, unions and students.

There seemed no way out except to accede to their demand for a 'national conference'. Once assembled, the conference delegates declared themselves sovereign and proceeded to create transitional institutions. Isolated, Kerekou could not resist this 'civil society' power seizure. Contagion at once took hold throughout Francophone Africa. National conferences drove incumbents from power in Niger, Congo-Brazaville and Madagascar. They failed to achieve this goal in Gabon, Zaire and Togo but nonetheless changed the rules of the political game. In Zambia, the support system sustaining the three-decade monopoly of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) collapsed with Kenneth Kaunda swept off in an election in 1991 (Young, 1998).

Equally important was the international conjuncture. The completely unexpected demolition of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of state socialism and the Soviet Union itself echoed powerfully throughout the world. Therefore, U.S. policy by 1990 promoted democratization. Even France long indulged with its African partners warned that pre-career was not exempted from democratization. President Francois Mitterend told the 1990 La Bualle Francophone summit that Paris would become tepid in its support of countries under French sway that failed to join the trend. Within the World Bank, influential voices called for political reform (democracy) as a necessary companion to economic liberation and loan (Young, 1998).

Based on this factor, countries in Africa began to democratize. The picture of democratization at 1989 in Africa as it follows: out of 53 countries in the continent, 16 were relatively democratic (Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazaville, Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Saotome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Tanzania); eight (8) were direct democracy (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Eritrea, Guinea, Morocco, Togo and Uganda); twelve (12) were under transition with moderate democratic commitment (Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritania, Mozambique, Sychelles, Zambia and Zimbabwe); five (5) under transition with ambiguous or circumscribed democratic commitment (Chad, Djibouti, The Gambia, Niger and Tunisia) five (5) under promised transition (Algeria, Equatorial Guinean, Nigeria, Swaziland and Zaire); five (5) under contested sovereignty (Angola, Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda and Somalia) while two (2) are authoritarian (Libya and Sudan) Young, 1998:27).

As the authoritarian regimes were being replaced, doubts were still expressed concerning sustainability of democracy in Africa. Some analysts have also questioned the focus on democratic reform given the parlous state of African economies. In this contribution, Nyong'o (1988) submits that there exist a definite correlation between the lack of democracy in African politics and the deterioration in socio-economic condition on the continent. But he quickly observed that the absence of democracy in Africa for much of the last thirty years encouraged lack of accountability and hence, high levels of accumulation. He therefore advocates democracy as a remedy arguing that democracy with its built-in accountability can lead to more responsible use of public resources and hence, high levels of development.

Ake (1996) reiterates Nong'o's views when he posits that Africa needs democracy not only because democracy is desirable in itself but because it will greatly facilitate development; and that there are four ways in which political authoritarianism undermine development in African. One, political repression turned politics into warfare, thereby infecting leaders with a siege mentality and

effectively relegating development issues to very low priorities. Two, the reliance on repression by leaders has disconnected them from their people and completely disassociated public policy from social needs. Three, constant coercion of the people has alienated them from the state which is therefore seen as a force to be feared, evaded, cheated and defeated as circumstances permit. Four, occasioning an enormous waste of human resources which is the very engine of development.

Ake further insists that authoritarianism is not conducive to economic growth in Africa because it is much against the grain of African culture. That Africa has participatory culture as a result of the organic nature of the society. The African society is one in which the burdens and rewards of citizens are shared, in which nothing is private, not even marriage, not even death. In response to fears that liberal democracy could lead to disintegration given the cultural pluralism of Africa, Ake maintains that democracy implies precisely the assumption of differences to be negotiated; to be conciliated, to be moved into phases of higher synthesis. Thus, social pluralism is an additional case for democracy.

Though there are scholars who doubt if democracy can facilitate development in Africa. Mkandawire(1996) for instance has argued that correlation does not suggest causation and that, it is doubtful that such correlation exists in Africa. He avers that the struggle for democracy must be for democracy in its own right, not attached to any conditionality. This is necessary because if those conditions failed, definitely democracy would also fail.

In the view of this author, democracy has potential to accelerate the pace of development in Africa by promoting popular participation and ensuring accountability in government. Besides, if the people are given a say in government, in the choice of their leaders and policy directions, it becomes more likely that their concern and aspirations will be incorporated into development plans and that their commitment will be better assured thereby.

## **RECAPITULATION:**

In this paper, three theories of democracy were identified namely: popular democracy, liberal democracy and people's democracy while the liberal democracy provided the theoretical framework. The conceptualization of liberal democracy was also carried out with the view that it implies representativeness with many phases of political rights but with ambiguous economic and social rights. This paper also features the three waves of democratic resurgence in Africa; the initial, the inter and the third waves. But the paper notes that the survival of the present democratic experiment in Africa depends largely on the economic managerial capability of the political leaders particularly in the deliverance of the dividend of democracy to the poverty-ridden majority of the indigenes of the continent.

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