Review

African perceptions of democracy

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There are many perceptions, concepts and constructs of what it means to be democratic or what constitutes a democracy. Unfortunately, many of those paradigms are linear, Western-oriented models, which tend to overlook the historical and cultural variations of democracy, especially in pre-colonial African systems of democratic governance. For example, there were associational and horizontal-type democracies, (which meant shared governance and consultation, essential to any concept of democratic-decision-making) prior to the Berlin Conference of 1884 to 1885, which essentially "carved up" Africa in the European scramble for Africa's great natural resources, vast land and cheap labor. This paper will illustrate the perceptions of what it means to be democratic from the African experience. As well as the perceptions becoming a reality as various African countries continue to experiment with their own versions of democracy in the post-colonial period.

Keywords: Democracy, types of democracies, African democracies.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Western precepts of democratic rule and institutions such as political parties, and what they ought or should do to be a viable democratic player have marred African peoples" conception of democratization. These normative notions were manifested during colonialism and linger in this Post-colonial era. Procedurally and substantively, Africans have been told by the Western world that democracy must fall within a particular paradigm if they truly and sincerely want to be considered democratic. And some would argue that perhaps Nigeria"s ongoing acute political and sociological maladies might be attributed to its progressive multiplication of constitutions (Joseph 1987; Diamond 1987). Consequently, their arguments about the instability of the system may have some merit, given the fact that Nigeria in the last 80 years (most of those years under British colonial rule) has had a total of nine constitutions. But, that is no worse than Italy"s Constitution of 1948, which has been amended 11 times to date. Moreover, constitutional democracy in and of itself is not sufficient to allay political, ethnic, religious, and class tensions in a heterogeneous society such as Nigeria. Various concomitant opportunities and constraints (which I will discuss later) must seriously be taken into consideration before any pensive discussions about Nigeria"s future take place.

Moreover, throughout the African diaspora during the pre-colonial era, African political systems were essentially democratic. They were democratic because they exhibited all the common characteristics of consent of the people and a balance between centralized power and decentralized power to prevent the abuse of authority by any one person (Osabu-Kle, 2000). Although, the systems at times did manifest exclusion, that is, elitism, the same can be said about most political systems. That is, that no political system worldwide is all-inclusive. Pre-colonial African systems can be separated into two main types. For example, the Logoli, the Talensi, and the Nuer, did not have centralized governance systems, administrative bureaucracy, centralized judicial systems, or sharp divisions in rank or status (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1940). Central authority, administrative machinery, and judicial institutions characterized the second and most common type of political system in pre-colonial Africa. The second type encompassed hierarchical and concentric levels of governance at the national, regional, state, and local levels. The localized groups had the least amount of authority, much like Western liberal or constitutional democracies. Nations, which practiced decentralized governance, included the Zulu, the Bemba, the Bankole, the Yoruba, the Akan, the Ga, the Ijaw, and the Ewe. Thus, this illustrates that democracy as a concept and as a substantive matter is not alien to Africa.

Furthermore, the notion that Africans do not know what democracy is (or is not), is shattered when surveys (for

example, Lewis and Bratton, 2000, Afrobarometer) tell a different story. For example, the survey included a sample size of 3,603 citizens of Nigeria, and 94% said they had at least some knowledge of democracy; another 81% supported democratic rule as opposed to other alternatives; 90% rejected non-democratic alternatives; 46% felt that the country was democratic (but with major problems) (and I might add that "major" problems are inherent in any nascent democracy); lastly, 84% of Nigerians were satisfied with democracy (compared to 75% of Tswana (Botswana) citizens with its much longer experimentation with democracy) (Lewis and Bratton, 2000). In a poll conducted with Nigerian academics, business leaders, professionals (for example, lawyers and physicians), religious and media leaders, there was a high level (59%) of the feeling that the Nigerian government only had limited interference in the editorial content in newspapers, magazines, and books (Zogby International, 2001). This finding suggests that democratic openness by the state, in the form of minimal media censure is at least apparent in the feelings of the country"s "movers and shakers. "As well, proponents of African style democracy insisted that basic democratic principles that are typically accepted as essential to any democratic model (popular participation, consent and accountability) are not an enigma to African societies. Furthermore, there is extensive anthropological evidence of democratic governance in indigenous African states (for example, Busia, 1967).

Ohachenu (1995) vividly suggests that African people"s idea of democratization is essentially derived from their own historical knowledge, experience, values and capabilities. Ohachenu goes on to say that the wealth of knowledge, experience, values and capabilities are essential ingredients for mass mobilization in the articulation of an African discourse and program on governance and democratization.

Juxtaposed to the paternalistic dominance of Western theories of democracies with its historical exclusion of women in politics, are the active roles women have played in Nigerian decision-making circles outside the household during the pre-colonial era. The hearth and paternalistic expectations were different in pre-colonial Nigeria, which in some respects has "spilled over" into the modern era, albeit more so at the local decision-making levels. Nevertheless, localized decision-making input is often more significant in democracy building than national input. I will briefly illustrate how women in pre-colonial Nigeria made contributions to democratic efforts; long before their Western counterparts were given the opportunity, or were expected.

Women in pre-colonial Nigeria and their contributions to democracy

The position of women in pre-colonial Nigeria differed based on the extensive number of ethnic clans throughout Nigeria. For example, a woman"s position varied according to the:

1) Kinship structure of the clan and 2) the role of women within the economic structure of the society (Terborg-Pen, 1987).

Yoruba women had the greatest opportunities to participate in economic activities such as manufacturing and trade. Yoruba society considered the work of women as complementary to the work of men, and some women achieved impressive status in the economic and social realms of Yoruba life. But, more commonly, women in Yoruba society achieved power by means of their lineage or by means of marriage into ruling families. This power extends to this day, for example, the former first lady Stella Obasanjo (the spouse of former President Obasanjo) of Nigeria garnered some level of power by the mere fact that she was married to the president of the country. And by achieving such power like the pre-colonial Yoruba women, they obtained indirect political influence. However, unlike former First Lady Obasanjo, pre-colonial Yoruba women rarely demonstrated their influence in public, because of fear of persecution and various other reasons. Unlike the Hausa women, who were restricted to the household, Yoruba women did have some opportunities to express themselves publicly about issues because of their economic and political rights and acumen. However, despite those desires of Yoruba and other women throughout pre-colonial Nigeria, the state and its bureaucracy tried to dictate the lifestyles of women, including the domesticity of women and their "wifely" and "motherly" duties of unpaid services they provided for the family. Lastly, colonial rule further undermined the economic and political aspirations of women, because colonial rule brought the European notion that women belonged in the atmosphere of hearth, nurturing her family. Thus, the state and colonial rule began to change and restrict the role of women throughout Nigeria by means of legislation.

African perceptions of democracy coexist with "the other," unlike in the Western paradigm. That is, elements of African cultures such as religion, which is often viewed as antithetical or at best with suspicion to democracy in the Western framework, have a long, rich history in various African societies. For example, in the case of northern Nigeria from 1946-1966 (pre and post-independence), the creation and expansion of "modern" (a.k.a. Western) political institutions, such as the national legislature, cabinet system and political parties were accompanied by the strengthening of the political roles played by traditional Muslim leaders known as emirs (Whitaker 1970). As Whitaker explains "far from modern institutions having simply driven out traditional ones," "elements of the institutions of each type or origin coalesced to form a workable system of power" (p. 460).

The political leaders affiliated with the Northern Peoples" Congress (NPC) party, which was and is a "modern" post-independent political institution that might have undermined the traditional leaders, instead sustained and cultivated the power and influence of the emirs, while contributing to democratization efforts. Whitaker"s (1970) study of Northern Nigeria is a potent and cogent critique of Modernization Theory.

Whitaker"s Modernization Theory critique (known as modernization revisionism) illustrates that modernization with all its accolades of democracy and capitalism is more than a zero-sum game. That is, that "advances" toward certain levels of modernity within African political, economic, and social systems are invariably accompanied by an equivalent "decline" in that system"s traditional or primordial culture (Schraeder, 2000). Traditional institutions can adapt to and coexist with modern institutions of governance. Whitaker"s (1970) classic study demonstrates that Nigeria"s NPC party had successfully performed the critical mobilization of the electorate function of the political system, by appealing to such traditional values as the "religious duty to obey and protect hereditary leaders" (p: 464). Therefore, ignoring the salience of appealing to traditional values in Nigeria can be the bane of a political party, and more important, ignoring this significant reality can be a detriment to any democratic model in Nigeria, and throughout Africa.

Individualism and Collectivity

Individualism and not the collectivity are the norm and the expected behavior under the Western democratic paradigm. While in many African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries, the norm is the collective group. African states are "an association of individuals and a community of communities" (Parekh 1993, p: 157). That is, competition among communities rather than the Western notion between individuals, political parties, and administrative subunits. The Western version of democratic rule is based on the Enlightenment period of assumptions of a Thomas More utopian vision of freedom as opposed to the glorification of the past as in many of the non-Western cultures. And this individualistic mode means that the ends of society are materialistic, and morality becomes secondary or not even part of the equation. Specifically, the Western version (which usually means the American version) of democracy tends to engage in a type of Quixote fantasy that should without question apply to other peoples. Thus, democratization theory is not only an idealization of the American experience, but it also represents the reincarnation of an already defunct modernization theory. Mainstream (Western) democratic theory represents a theory of change possessing the same assumptions of post-Second World War"s Marshall plan to rebuild Europe, assumptions of economic and social determinants and a

nonlinear direction of change. This form of liberal democracy is the hallmark of the post-Cold War global wave of democratization.

Democratization studies typically overlook the salience of traditional loyalties in regard to governance in Africa. For example, many areas of national life are still governed by pre-capitalist relationships, especially in regards to land tenure relationships. Thus, in order for democracy to "stick" in many parts of Africa, it must be on the basis of radicalizing the basic institutions of governance at the grassroots level (Mabogunje, 1995). The grassroots level is where locally based NGOs can make an effective impact on democratizing the locales. But, unfortunately, the bureaucrats and so-called experts, as illustrated for example, have always resisted the grassroots organizations by the 1968 reform of the Local Government system in Western Nigeria (Mabogunje, 1995).

The bureaucrats and local citizenry desires are often at odds, and a conflict of interests is at the root of the problem and only makes democratic efforts that more arduous. Hence, the very structure of the localized community in Nigeria takes on a very strategic magnitude in any attempt to truly democratize the country. As Mabogunje (1995) has pointed out, the structure of localized community-based Non-governmental organizations varies throughout the country. In the Igbo areas, the structure is the obodo, a group of six to seven villages acknowledging a common descent and strong social bond. Although, in the Yoruba areas, the structure is based on the ilu (a town), but which could be a group of villages and hamlets deriving from a former ilu. And in the northern parts of Nigeria, which is dominated by the Fulani or Hausa-Fulani, has articulated a somewhat peculiar localized community-based Non-governmental organizational structure of governance, which existed prior to the colonial era. The Fulani have the dakace (kauye), which is the village area or its urban equivalent. Lastly, in the Southeastern (which are primarily Igbo) parts of Nigeria along the Gulf of Guinea and Cameroon, for example, in Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Rivers States, the typical structure is that of a clan. So what does all this have to do with democratizing Nigeria, and do the specific types of local Non-governmental organizations add to or detract from democratization efforts?

Mabogunje (1995) has suggested that by taking the governance institutions at the local level of the diverse ethnic and nationality groups and infusing them with new and uniform operational rules, they can help foment democracy in Nigeria. By taking the attributes of the various localized Non-governmental organizations and consolidating them into a national forum for governance, democracy in Nigeria has a viable chance. Furthermore, the ability of the state to raise revenue, i.e., taxes, is made less un-mitigating if not more palatable to citizens because they may be more willing to pay the taxes.

Legitimacy and stability will likely increase also when citizens feel that they have a stake in the day-to-day governmental processes of democracy. And although at present, Nigeria"s democratic experimentation is in an inchoate stage of development, there appears to be promise at the local level.

Additionally, the establishment of a consensus-oriented dialogue for decision-making, a constitutional legitimating of the rule of ethnic groups, and a decentralization of political power, so that local and regional autonomy becomes possible has been vividly put forth by such African scholars as Kwame Gyekye (1992), Kwasi Wiredu (1996), and Olusegun Oladipo (2001). For example, prominent African philosopher Kwame Gyekye makes the case for the relevance of traditional political ideas in contemporary African life. Gyekye has suggested that there was a democratic order in pre-colonial Africa, which would be advantageous for modern day Africa. While Kwasi Wiredu, another eminent African philosopher, makes a case for a nonparty polity in Africa. Wiredu views the Western model of multipartyism based on majority rule as not securing a reasonable system of democracy whether in the Western world or not, but especially in African multiethnic countries like Nigeria. Wiredu also contends that in at least some African traditional systems of politics, there is the potential for democracy based on consensus upon which the countries can construct a workable model. Both Gyekye (1992) and Wiredu (1996) posit that viable political institutions can be developed on the basis of Africa"s own traditions of political rule, such as consensus and not winner-take-all or majority rule as in many Western democracies. More succinctly, they claim that the traditional system of government in pre-colonial times did have some democratic features from which a new political system can benefit. Although, both Gyekye (1992) and Wiredu (1996) both make explicit and persuasive arguments, a critical question becomes, how does a country like Nigeria with not only a myriad of internal factions (for example, anarchy and tyranny) but also external forces like financial donor mandates balance the need to become more democratic? I will momentarily enumerate Gyekye and Wiredu"s suggestions so as to make transparent their plausible solutions to the "democratic dilemma." And would Proportional Representation (PR) be more appropriate for such a heterogeneous society like Nigeria?

David Held (1995) suggests that democracy in modern times is defined in terms of a number of liberal democratic tenets. Held asserts that these liberal democratic tenets include 1) the centrality in principle of an impersonal structure of public power, of a constitution to help safeguard rights, 2) a diversity of power centers within and outside the state, including the institutional arena to promote open dialogue and deliberation between alternative viewpoints and agendas. As Oladipo (2001) has posited, although, the traditional African

African political order was based primarily on kinship and it was guided almost entirely by oral tradition and a body of unwritten conventions, it did not lack the core ingredients of a democratic order as identified by Held (1995).

The basic components of the traditional African democratic order included the following, as investigated by Oladipo (2001). First, power was derived from the people for whom it was held in trust. These conditions of democratic governance were safeguarded by the provision for the removal of rulers, and the specifics for such removal, witness the case of the Akans of Ghana. And although the monarch"s power was hereditary, he or she could be removed from office on such offenses as oppression and arbitrariness in governance; corruption; and neglect of state affairs. These points were enumerated (that is, constitutionally-based) in the charter of leadership that defined the contract (for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau"s Social Contract of 1762) between the king and his people. Thus, in traditional African societies there existed a system of checks and balances (essential for any democracy) which was meant to ensure that the king did not become authoritarian in his/her rule, whether it was King Sonni Ali of Songhai, Queen Nzinga of Ndongo, or Queen Makeeba of the once powerful Ethiopian empire.

Secondly, the reliance on dialogue and consultation as a means of decision-making was and still is in many instances, a democratic feature of the African democratic order. Busia (1967, p.28) several years ago expressed this democratic feature when he wrote "When a Council, each member of which was the representative of a lineage, met to discuss matters affecting the whole community, it had always to grapple with the problem of representing sectional and common interests. In order to do this, the members had to talk things over; they had to listen to all different points of view. So strong was the value of solidarity that the chief aim of the counselors was to reach unanimity, and they talked until this was achieved." And Nwala (1985 p: 168) expressed the same idea, with specific reference to the Igbo of southern Nigeria, "Unanimity and all the rigorous processes and compromises...that lead to it are all efforts made to contain the wishes of the majority as well as those of the minority. In short, they are designed to arrive at what may be abstractly called ‚the general will of the people of the community". Hence, this is another feature of the African traditional democratic order. Decision-making was based on consensus rather than on majority rule as in Western models of democracy.

Wiredu (1996) observes that it is vogue (at the moment) to replace the one-party system with a multiparty system based on majority rule. This move is especially apparent in nascent democracies like Nigeria and other newly independent countries (NICs). But, such a "forward" leap into multipartyism may be the bane of democratic aspirations in Nigeria and other multiethnic

states in Africa. Multipartyism may actually polarize multiethnic states even further by condoning the "winner-takes-all" mentality, thus reducing the state"s capacity to keep the lacy country intact. As a result, there have been calls to create a form of Social or People"s democracy like in China, or welfare democracy that is congruent with traditional African social structures. Nevertheless, this excludes the one-party system, which was popularized in the early independence years of the 1960s as a manifestation of African democracy (Post 1991). Moreover, how can we address minority rights (whether it is racial, ethnic, religious, and/or ideological) in a system where "winner-takes-all" in Western models of democracy? Thus, the tendency to place any one group of persons consistently in the position of the minority can easily generate divisiveness in society. Another limitation that Wiredu (1996) points out with the multiparty system is that it is a system in which the party that wins the majority of seats or greatest proportion of votes is consistently in power, and how democratic is that? This constant struggle for power promotes conflict and disaffection rather than consensus and cooperation. And the minority group always has to capitulate to the whims and wishes of the majority. Compromise becomes an issue if and only if the majority group views the outcome as potentially destroying the status quo "fabric" which they directly benefit from. Or if a political cleavage is serious enough like slavery, the majority party might consider giving up some concessions for the "good" of society.

Therefore, current forms of democracy based on the principle of majority rule are limited, especially in consensus-oriented traditions and cultures throughout Africa. Wiredu (1996) proposes that African countries build on that consensus tradition that is found in some African traditional political systems, for example, the Ashanti system in Ghana. No political parties were the norm and decisions were based not only on consensus, but also on choice of representatives. Such a scenario made it possible for all concerned to participate in power and reduced the potential for conflict, which is inherent in electoral competitive multiparty systems. In the Ashanti system of governance, a coalition of citizens whose right of representation was revered. Local conditions as Wiredu (1996) has suggested should be taken more seriously in democratic efforts throughout Nigeria and the whole of Africa.

However, Oladipo (2001) raises the salient question in regard to the extent that the traditional African model of democracy is it adequate for modern times? Oladipo (2001) opines that the traditional African model of democracy may be inadequate because of the emphasis on the clan as a basis of leadership, an arrangement which required "the establishment of a hierarchy of clans." He views such an arrangement as anachronistic. And how would justice play out in such a traditional model of democracy in Africa, based on heads of clans?

Oladipo (2001) has suggested that the above limitations of the traditional order of democratic rule can be overcame with decentralized power that allows for a significant degree of regional and local autonomy in Africa"s multiethnic countries. The decentralization would allow for political representation to be structured along lines that would yield each ethnic group to develop according to its values, culture, historical experience and aspirations. Secondly, according to Oladipo this decentralization would prevent a situation in which some see themselves as permanent outsiders to the state. Lastly, for Oladipo, the consensual, nonparty form of democracy and a structure of political power, which guarantees substantial sovereignty to the various groups in Africa"s multiethnic, multi-religious states, appear to be the best type of democracy under the current circumstances.

Wiredu (1996) advises not to glorify consensus decision-making too much, because it too has flaws. For example, consensus in the past was not always attained; conflicts arose between lineages and ethnic groups. And that it is important to note that disputes can be resolved without achieving reconciliation. Furthermore, as Wiredu (1996) notes, reconciliation is a form of consensus, thus democratic tendencies are manifest in at least some form, just short of war. And war is obviously the most extreme negation of consensus, and the most blatant form of anarchy.

Wealth, education and democracy

Other theories of democracy assume that countries with high levels of wealth and education will enhance the chances for democratic rule. Some theorists suggest that the more homogeneous a society, the higher likelihood for democracy to "stick." And with the end of the Cold War, democratic theorists suggest that countries now not only have the opportunity to experiment with democracy, but must become democratic if they are to become real players in the global marketplace of capitalism. Thus, democracy becomes a function of economic development, education, the end of the cold War, and homogeneity. Moreover, economic arguments about democracy typically come in two forms.

Seymour (1959) advanced an intuitively basic correlation between wealth and democracy. This simple directional correlation that as wealth increases so too does democracy generally, remains largely true. But Lipset"s proposal is not helpful in explaining the oil monarchies of the Gulf States, which tend to be non-democratic and more authoritarian. A second type of economic and democracy argument has been put forth by Barrington Moore (1966), who investigated economic history to expose the processes that generated democracies. Moore was quite successful at explaining why India was unable to achieve economic modernization

but he could not demonstrate why India"s ability to become a democracy occurred before undergoing industrial development. And I might add that the African countries of Botswana and Mauritius (as members of the Organization of African Unity) and Jamaica (part of the African Diaspora) all have working democracies, but not high levels of economic development.

Moreover, peasantry has survived in India amidst democracy, whereas in the former Soviet Union, China, Japan, and Germany have all experienced a dictatorship during the course of their industrialization. Unlike the United States, which has never had, a peasantry (however one could make the very plausible argument that it had slavery which is even less democratic than peasantry) only had a commercial farming class, which enhanced its democratic survival based on Lipset (1959) and Moore"s (1966) theories.

Why has democracy in India survived under the so-called highly unfavorable conditions? That is, India is a poor country, many peasants, low economic productivity, low Gross Domestic Product (GDP) levels, low income per capita levels, high levels of illiteracy and so on. Varshney (1998) has put forth four plausible explanations to explain the enigmatic case of India. The history of India and the processes of party formation during colonial rule under Britain and thereafter, and its nation-building that went on during the period of the independence movement helped foment democracy. As Varshney (1998
p: 38) makes clear, "It was not the British legacy per se, but rather the strategic interactions that took place between British authorities and national-movement leaders that laid the foundations of democracy." And as Weiner (1989 p: 78) has stated "an impressive number of erstwhile British colonies," including India, "have maintained British-style democratic institutions for all or most of their post-independence history," while "not a single former Dutch, Belgian, or French colony currently has democratic institutions." This fact begs the question, is the British model of parliamentary democracy more viable for former colonies vis-a-vis other colonial systems? Secondly, Varshney (1998) posits that the links between India"s strategy of economic development and its democracy complemented one another. Third, the structure of India"s ethnic configuration to its democracy has helped foster democratic rule. And lastly, Varshney (1998) has asserted that the crucial role of India"s political leadership in the period just before independence in 1947, when democratic norms were institutionalized, taking democratic rights away from certain parties and citizens would have been relatively effortless.

Modern democracies as Moore (1966) observed them emerged amid the process of European and American industrialization especially during the Industrial Revolution that began in England about 1760. Uniquely, both industrialization and democratization were transformations without precedent. Moreover, democracy undermined the hereditary "blue blood" principle of rule

and industry transformed what had been essentially rural, agrarian societies. Moore"s (1966) assessment led him to his famous decree "no bourgeois, no democracy," but also to a second dictum that can be summed up as "yes peasants, no democracy" as Varshney (1998) has suggested. And although, the emergence and growth of the bourgeois or middle class can bring about industrialization, it cannot in and of itself bring about democratization. Democracy depends on what happens to rural societies in the process of industrialization, that is, on whether agriculture is commercialized, and how (Moore, 1966; Varshney, 1998). Nevertheless, as Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1989 p: 1) have posited "India, despite the steady erosion of democratic institutions ...and continues to stand as the most surprising and important case of democratic endurance in the developing world." And I might add that democracy in the developing countries of Costa Rica has been in place since 1948 and in Venezuela since 1958.

Schmitter and Karl (1991 p: 76) have suggested many types of democracy exist, "and their diverse practices produce a similarly varied set of effects." Although, Schmitter and Karl submitted that the particular form a democracy takes depends on a country"s socioeconomic conditions as well as its ingrained structures and policy practices. However, the researchers overlook the salience of variables such as colonialism and its residuals and cultural norms, which Claude Ake (1996) elucidated in his Democracy and Development in Africa.

Ake (1996) postulated that political conditions in Africa are the greatest constraints to development. He illustrated that the main characteristics of the colonial state in Africa, absolutism and arbitrariness, carried over into the Post-colonial state, and encouraged a development paradigm we call modernization theory. But there are at least two major limitations with modernization theory; it ignores the historical and cultural specificity of African countries. Therefore, from the genesis, modernization theory was useless as a tool of social transformation (that is, democratic rule) and economic development in Africa. Ake (1996) suggests a development scheme for Africa that is people-centered and based on empowerment, confidence building, self-realization and self-reliance. According to Ake, such a development framework must necessarily be operative in a kind of democracy that emphasizes definitive social, political and economic rights, recognizes collective rights, inclusiveness, and the development of institutions, and lastly (but not the least) empowers people to participate in decision-making (not merely as subjects) at the local, state and national levels.

CONCLUSION

Transitions to democracy

Democratization and democratic transitions have been

occurring at a decisive speed in the last twenty years, stimulated by the collapse of communist regimes (especially in the former Soviet Union) and globalization of market economies. From Latin America in the 1980s and Africa and the Eastern European/former Soviet bloc of the 1990s, there has been a "third wave" (Huntington, 1991) of democratization taking shape. Accompanying this "third wave" is the proliferation of scholarly writings examining these democratic transitions. These writings are more focused on civil society (including Non-governmental organizations) and its contributions to democracy, as opposed to the paradigm of economic performance and institutions-based democracy. Civil society theorists can thank Alexis de Tocqueville and his Democracy in America (1898) in the nineteenth century for setting the tone for current day civil society considerations as it relates to democracy. Tocqueville described the importance of independent groups for democracy, with democracy being more than a struggle for election and reelection among competing candidates. Civil society is a spirit of cooperation and deliberation via autonomous group activity. Tocqueville affirmed that the "full" development of democracy occurred in the United States because conditions best permitted the diffusion of European social ideas. However, he was highly critical of certain expressions of American democracy. For example, he believed that public opinion (like the military in Nigeria) tended toward tyranny. As well, that majority rule could be as oppressive as the rule of an autocrat.

As Schmitter and Karl (1991 p: 80) has suggested, civil society at its best, "provides an intermediate layer of governance between the individual and the state that is capable of resolving conflicts and controlling the behavior of members without public coercion." Furthermore, "a viable civil society can mitigate conflicts and improve the quality of citizenship - without relying exclusively on the privatism of the marketplace" (Schmitter and Karl, 1991 p: 80).

The expansive body of literature on civil society and democracy linkages ranges from Chazan (1982, 1994); Rothchild and Chazan (1987); and Cohen (1992). Diamond (1992) posits that extensive mobilization of civil society was a critical source of pressure for democratic change in Nigeria and other countries in a study of global democratization. Thus, it is transparent that in order for students of democratization to understand democratic processes and transitions, one must investigate the salience of civil society.

Lewis (1992) contends that the bilateral interaction of state elites and autonomous associations (civil society) is the only context in which sustainable democratic governance can be achieved. And while an active civil society does not guarantee a thriving democracy, civil society actors can strengthen the infrastructure or environment for civil rights and liberties to "take off" if not "stick." Civil society actors can play a vital role in the construction of civil interests and social differentiation,

making it much easier to create a democratic state, as opposed to a non-active or nonexistent civil society. Ultimately, the state must be the supreme implementer, enforcer, and guarantor of political freedoms, individual rights, institutional safeguards and efficacious participatory structures and processes.

Furthermore, however glorious and congruent civil society might be with democratization, researchers must be careful not to assume that civil society is not an unmitigated blessing for democracy as Schmitter (1997) cautions. He makes a poignant argument that civil society can affect the consolidation and subsequent functioning of democracy in a number of detrimental ways. For example, civil society can make the formation of majorities more difficult, lengthy, and delicate, thus lowering the legitimacy of democratic governments. But, conversely, I would suggest that without at least a tenuous civil society, the state may wield and exercise too much power (tyranny) at the expense of the citizens, and without challenges, the state may in fact become more authoritarian which is the antithesis of any democratic model. Secondly, Schmitter posits that civil society may build into the policymaking process a systematically biased distribution of influence, especially where its formative principles are individualistic and voluntary. Thirdly, Schmitter views civil society as possibly being detrimental to democracy by imposing an elaborate and obscure process of compromise upon political life, with policies no one wanted at the outset and with which no one can identify. Fourthly, Schmitter goes on to suggest that civil society may be harmful to democracy because civil society can reinforce the tendency toward "pork-barrel" solutions whereby individual associations or movements satisfy their interests or passions at the expense of the whole, which results in an ineffectual and inflationary-prone economy. But, I would suggest that these "pork-barrel" solutions will and do happen with politicians every day, with or without civil society, because of a need to satisfy constituents at any costs, because the bottom line for politicians is to win elections. Lastly, Schmitter asserts that civil society may actually create multiple civil societies, all occupying the same space and polity but organizing interests and passions into communities that are ethnically, linguistically, or culturally distinct, even exclusive. But, this scenario can and does happen with any crosscutting or cleavage issue such as slavery or religious tolerance, regardless of the level of civil society.

Civil society is seen as the crucial ingredient for creating public accountability and participatory government (Fatton, 1991). However, as Lewis (1992 p: 32) has warned us, "... the central institutions of civil society are quiescent and fragmented in most African countries. The democratic project in Africa entails basic changes in popular participation and the associational arena." Nevertheless, some headway is being made in the civil society arena throughout Africa, as manifested in

the labor movement in Zambia; exuberant professional organizations, women"s grassroots organizations, an active, independent press in Nigeria; and churches and lawyers" associations in Kenya to name a few.

As discussed earlier, many theories of democracy tout the need for economic development as a necessary foundation for democracy to not only exist but thrive. And economic development usually is a buzzword for capitalism. Thus, capitalism influences political democracy. An early modernization theorist such as Lipset (1959) took an evolutionary or Darwinian and pragmatic approach vis-a-vis Karl Marx"s revolutionary, idealist approach. Lipset argued that economic development is a predictor of political democracy. More current modernization theorists like Fukuyama (1992) and Inglehart (1997) have posited that politics, economics, and cultural changes follow relatively predictable patterns over time. With these changes, an enlightened and educated citizenry, this in turn would lead to a community with virtues of tolerance, moderation, and democracy (Dahl, 1971; Diamond et al., 1995).

Africa"s democratic experiments and the West"s view of how Africa should go about democratizing are often firmly rooted in the belief that Africa"s economic marginalization impedes its democratic aspirations. Ironically, the successful anti-colonial movements throughout Africa in the 1960s were inspired by the most essential of democratic principles, that people should rule themselves via governments of their own choosing. And as Richard Joseph (1997 p: 363) summons "Who should be the social agents of democracy?" Moreover, cries of Africa"s minimal desire to become or once again be democratic echoes loud from either side of the Pacific throughout the Western world. Thus, there are several traditional arguments against establishing Western-style democracies in Africa (Ake, 1991).

Democracy in the Western sense may be antithetical to Africa"s brand of democracy based on communal traditions of consensus building. As Nigerian political economist Claude Ake (1991) suggested, this fallacy stems from confusion between the principles of democracy and its institutional manifestations. Ake (1991) goes on to say that traditional African political systems were imbued with democratic values, such as patrimony and communalism, a strong emphasis on participation and standards of accountability. "Chiefs were answerable not only for their own actions but for natural catastrophes such as famine, epidemics, floods, and drought" (Ake, 1991 p: 34). Another argument that is espoused against democracy in Africa revolves around the social pluralism of African societies, notably ethnic dissimilarities (Ake 1991). The problem is not ethnicity but horrendous leadership; there is nothing inherently conflictual about ethnic differences (p: 34). If ethnicity was inherently antagonistic, countries like the United States and Canada would be in a constant state of flux!

Ake"s (1991) third reason given by doubters of democracy in Africa involves the issue of democratization to economic development. That is, that Africa must be emancipated from "ignorance, poverty, and disease" before it can assume the role of a democratic state. Once again, how does one explain India"s phenomenal success with democracy since its independence in 1947 (with the exception of eighteen months in the mid-1970"s), even though it has rampant poverty? And what about Botswana and Mauritius as members of the Organization of African Unity (OAS)? And how does one explain democratic Jamaica (as part of the African Diaspora) with its low levels of economic development? Hence, Ake (1991) challenges researchers to consider the primary issue as not whether it is more important to eat than to vote, but who is entitled to decide which is more significant.

Therefore, economic development in and of itself cannot explain the democratization process, especially in Africa. African countries (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) are mostly economically impotent. The average growth rate for sub-Saharan Africa between 1980 to 1989 was minus 2.2 percent (Ake, 1991). Consequently, factors other than economic development are also likely to play a role in influencing democracy (Bollen and Jackman 1990). For example, what roles do colonialism and neocolonialism play? Lastly, another factor reported in most theories of democracy is that democracy is highly correlated with levels of education (Lipset, 1959; Almond and Verba, 1963; Dahl, 1971; Diamond et al., 1995) but others have found that education has an independent effect on democracy (Gonick and Rosh, 1988).

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