Popular Struggles for Democracy and Crises of Transitions in Africa

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Abstract

The paper brings to focus mis-presentation of civil society groups' struggles for multi-party democracy in Africa as the only entry point into understanding the struggles for democracy by the African peoples. Popular uprising against dictators, ethnic militia violence, popular rejections of election results are forms of popular struggles for genuine democracy that are yet to be given sufficient attention in our discourses of popular struggles for democracy in Africa. This error seems to be a product of post-Cold War neo-liberal discourse of democracy, which tends to 'emasculate democracy of its social and historical dimensions; and presents it as an ultimate nirvana'. The paper deconstructs this trend and follows up with an explanation of how such trend created crises of transitions; and how the African states have attempted at coping with these crises. The central argument in the paper is that although democratic transitions in most post-independence Africa remains endangered; there is nothing that makes democracy un-African or makes Africans ungovernable. The major set-back for democracy in the continent is its failure to evolve from the grains of its best-fit values but the imported 'best-practice' principles of the grand theories.

Key words: popular struggle, democracy, transition and Africa

Introduction

The major focus of this paper, using critical approach, is to illuminate on the blind spot in the discourse of struggles for democracy in Africa for three main reasons. Firstly, the urge to prove that struggles for democracy in Africa did not commence with the post-cold-war multi-party agitations or end with attainment of independence by the colonial colonies. 'The struggles continued in different forms.'[1] Popular resistance of the African peoples against the policies of International Monetary Fund and the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes, rise in ethnic milita violence, and violent reactions to results of general elections represent various forms of struggles for genuine democracy[2].

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[1]Shivji Issa G, Good Governance, Bad Governance and the Quest for Democracy in Africa: An Alternative Perspective, A Plenary Lecture presented to Nordic Africa Days, (Uppsala, Sweden from October 3 to 5, 2003).

[2]Seddon, D and Zeillig, L, Class & Protest in Africa: New Waves, ROAPE Vol. 32, No. 103, Imperialism & African Social Formation (Mar., 2005), pp. 9-27 (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005); Harrison Graham, Bringing Political Struggle Back in: African Politics, Power & Resistance, ROAPE Vol. 28, No. 89. State of the Union: Africa in 2001 (Sep., 2001), pp. 387-402 (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2001)

These struggles, however failed to attract serious attention because they hardly take the forms of modern struggles of civil society. They are either condemned as 'primordial, illegitimate, or backward, terrorist, fundamentalist and tribalistic[3] violence This condemnation not only prevents us from understanding the forms and ideologies of the peoples' resistance to their daily oppression and marginalisation and how this resistance threatens the stability of the state.

It also deprives us 'of an important piece of locally generated knowledge, values and cultures'[4] that sometimes underlines the open struggles for democracy The boomerang effect of this neglect is well represented by the upsurge in Arab Revolution starting from Tunisia in 18th December, 2010, spreading to Egypt and Libya. The Boko Haram, MASSOB, MEND, OPC and Ombatse uprisings, and the Jos crisis in Nigeria are all mispresented by the Nigerian state as tribal, terrorist or religious crises when in reality the underbelly of theses crises is struggle for genuine democracy and struggle against the exclusion of their ethnic groups from the loop of development, inclusive governance and poverty alleviation.

Secondly, the paper deconstructs the post-cold war neo-liberal democratic discourse which tends to 'emasculate democracy of its social and historical dimensions and present it as an ultimate nirvana'[5] using civil society as the enegiser of the democratisation pulse in Africa. Civil societies in the forms of the modern NGOs, workers' unions, and students' associations no doubt provided the platforms for the articulation of the civil resistance. However the main drive of the struggles for democracy lies in the spirit and determination of the people to reject all forms of oppression and to enforce their ineffable right to control the decisions that determine their daily lives and future prospects.

As a corollary to this view, it becomes pertinent to discuss how liberal democracy lubricates the involvement of the civil society groups. Thirdly, the need to show the contributions of African scholars and why they failed to address the problem associated with the democratisation process earlier than the post-cold war period also became compelling. . The second part of the paper explains the crisis of transitions and the challenges for African states in their attempts to cope with this crisis.

Background to popular struggles for democracy in Africa

There is a need for us to appreciate that collision of the people with the dictatorial leaders, to have control over their own lives and destinies has been an ongoing event in human history. The popular struggles for democracy in Africa are no exceptions to this collision course. They are emancipatory political struggles aimed at state reconstitution, participation and self determination that never terminated in the struggles for independence or the 'third wave' of democracy[6]. These struggles represent emancipatory demands that arise from the spirit of nationalism through which every national ethnic group demands for equal economic, social and political opportunities and active promotion of the welfare of their people.

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[3]Shivji, Issa G, Globalisation and Popular Resistance Local Perspectives on Globalisation: The African Case, Joseph Semboja; Juma Mwapachu; and Eduard Jansen, (eds.,) p. 8. (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2002)
[4] Op cit 3
[5] Op cit 3
[6]Huntington, S, The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991)

For example in the late 1950s, widespread unrest occurred in Cameroon as the main party opposed to French rule was banned, leading to a bloody and protracted guerrilla war. Independence came in 1960, but in the context of extensive violence. Also the Côte d'Ivoire's civil war that erupted in September 2002, started with a section of the army that attempted a coup d'Etat. Though the coup failed, but the insurgent soldiers took control of the northern part of the country under the leadership of former student leader Guillaume Soro. Their main grouse was that that northerners were treated as second class citizens bringing to the fore the question of Ivorian identity and nationality.

The on and off war got to a climax in 2009 when through popular protests backed by the French government a regime change was effected. In Nigeria, apart from the indigenous people struggles for independence as exemplified in Aba Women's riot of 1929, the remote cause of the incessant maiming and killing of Nigerian citizens in Jos, the Plateau State capital, has remained the same for over a century. It is a case of ethnic groups, specifically the Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere and the Hausa-Fulani, laying claim to pre-eminence over one another. The contention lies with who is an 'indigene' or 'settler' in Jos[7].

As argued about two hundred years ago by Mancini[8] the nationalities which do not possess a government issuing from their innermost life and which are subjects to laws imposed upon them from outside have become means for the purposes of others and, therefore mere objects. Mancini's argument remains relevant in the contemporary African states taking the rates of agitations by ethnic groups into consideration, e.g the Ogoni in Nigeria and the Massai in Kenya and Tanzania[9]. Every nation strives to attain self determination. The popular struggles for democracy in the African states are in line with Mancini's position as they reflect the spirit of the innermost life in a person for them to enjoy the ineffable right without distinction of gender, race, nation or class and to control the decisions that determine their daily lives and future prospects.

In light of the above and going by the colonial heritage, it is apparent that the democratic deficits in the colonial and post-colonial African states provide the determinate conditions for these popular struggles in the first instance. As discussed by Olateju[10] while the African traditional societies were gradually evolving into modern states in the forms of empires and kingdoms during pre-colonial period, the post-colonial African states did not result from the sequence of these 'historical developments and cumulative experiences'[11] rather they are "a 'hand-me-down' phenomenon in many respects."[12] In essence, the post-colonial states being artificial entities created by the colonial rulers, sustained the institutions and apparatuses used by the preceding colonial regimes to exercise political powers and the kind of social relationships required for the daily reproduction of liberal capitalism which has been equated with democracy in the neo-liberal discourse.

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[7] Nkanga; Asynopsis Peter on the Jos crisis-Nigerian Tribune. January 28, 2011

[8] Mancini, Pasquale Stanislao 1851 Delia nazionalitd come fondamento del diritto delle genti: (Prelezione. Turin (Italy): Botta, 1851) p.65, translated by Hans Kohn in The Idea of Nationalism: A Study of Its Origins and Background. (New York: Macmillan, 1961)

[9] Goran Hyden, Livelihoods and Security in Africa: Contending Perspectives in the New Global Order. African Studies Quarterly. Vol. 1, Issue 1. 1997

[10] Olateju, O Democratisation in the Absence of States: Lessons from Africa APCJ (June 2012) forthcoming.

[11] Ayang' Nyang'O, P; ed., 'Popular Struggles for Democracy' in Africa, (London; and New Jersey: Zed Books. 1987) p.17

[12] op cit 9

Colonial rule successfully wiped out the pre-colonial dependency of the traditional chief on his councilors; replaced such with neo-patrimonial autocracy and elite rulership that depended for its sustenance, upon the colonial and later foreign powers[13]. For example the ideological row between Prime Minister Lumumba and President Kasa-Vubu was exploited by the US government and other Western nations to assist Mobutu who was then Lumumba Chief of Army Staff, to oust Lumumba in a CIA sponsored coup, on 14th September, 1960[14] to retain Kasa-Vubu as the President[15]. The open rapport between Mobutu and the West between 1965 and 1997, a period that his dictatorial regime lasted, is well documented by various scholars. Another open support for Africa's dictators was exemplified by French Prensident Valery Giscard d'Estaing who declared himself "friend and family" of Bokassa in 1975[16].

While France was supplying Bokassa regime with financial aid and military backing, Bokassa was in exchange supplying France with uranium which was very vital for France's nuclear energy and weapons programme in the era of the Cold War. This was in addition to taking the French President to frequent hunting trips in the Central Africa. Easterly argues that colonial administration re-enforced autocracy in Africa while neo-colonialism sustains and consolidates such[17]. This was a reinforcement of Meredith's initial argument that the effects of the neo-patrimonial autocracy are bad governance and extremely selfish and cruel governors in the likes of Mobutu in Zaire, Idi Amin in Uganda and Bedel Bokassa in Central African Republic.[18]

Through these foreign backed dictators as exemplified above , Mwaura explains that the colonial administrative structures were maintained as well as the economic structures to preserve the flow of wealth from the continent to the West[19]. Post-colonial states could hardly stand up to their own traditional historical analyses because their structures are mostly heirs of liberal capitalist democracy that has nothing to do with communal values of the sub-Sahara African traditions in particular. The political sector as recorded by Gentili[20] witnessed the promotion of the rules of plurality in the form of liberal democracy through multiparty democracy and building of the "appropriate" institutions such as the adoption of the rule of law and promotion of civil society as sine-qua-non for the democratisation processes. This is a 'best practice' approach to democracy that contradicts the 'best fit' values.

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[13]Nugent, P, Africa since Independence: A Comparative History. (New York: Palgrave   Macmillan, 2004) pp. 107-108

[14] Wrong, Michela. *In The Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in Mobutu's Congo*. Perennial, 2002; p. 68-70

[15] Larry Delvin was one of the CIA agents of the Cold War who recently gave an eye witness accounts of the developments of the Congo's tumultuous post-independence years leading to the planned elimination of Patrice Lumumba on the order of President Eisenhower of the US. (see Chief of Station, Congo: Fighting Cold War in Hot Zone, United States: Public Affairs, 2007)

[16] See Hoyle Ross " A campaign Catches Fire" Time 30 March 1981 and Fuller Thomas " But ex-president's past looms large: Giscard's new role at heart of Europe" New York Times, 28 February, 2002.

[17] Easterly, William, The Whiteman's Burden: why the West efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good. New York: The Penguin Press. 2006), 273

[18]Martin Meredith, Martin The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence,   (London: Free Press, 2005)

[19]Mwaura, N, Kenya today: Breaking the yoke of colonialism in Africa, (USA: Algora   Publishing, 2005)

[20]Gentili, A.M 'Party, Party Systems and Democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa', paper presented at the Sixth Global Forum on Reinventing Government, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 24-27 2005

Mundy and Murphy[21] debunk the 'best practice' rhetoric by arguing that democracy requires more than formal establishment of certain rights, institutions and procedures. Important as these are, consolidation of the social relations which support these rights, institutions and procedures are vital for consideration. Such support according to them includes the development of an educated middle class and a framework of civil institutions. Submission of Mundy and Murphy are vital but non-consideration of the historical analyses of the social relations weakens their argument.

To consolidate the social relations that support rights, institutions and procedures for the best practice in democracy requires the treatment of the indigenous values as assets to such social relations rather than treating them as barbaric and anti-growth. The best practice assumption however seems to ignore that to be different in democracy does not necessarily mean to be right or wrong. Democracy is very flexible and it is this flexibility that makes it highly complex. To understand democracy requires understanding its context. The context of any object is more important in the understanding and application of the object. By context, I refer to the human element that brings together and cement the bricks of knowledge of the object which in this wise, is democracy. How people decide to put the bricks of knowledge together defines the usage of the bricks.

Every community has peculiar human element that cements their bricks of knowledge in a particular way. Development of institutions, rights and procedures cannot be assumed outside the context of their application, hence the justification for the non-uniformity in the application of democracy as a system of rule. Analysis of popular struggles for democracy that adopts the 'best practice' approach outside the context of the community even when the people think that 'this is not the way we do it here' will end up disconnecting the people from their peculiar context. Democracy does not necessarily need to   …consist of a single unique set of institutions. There are many types of democracy and their diverse practices produce a similarly varied set of effects[22]

This is where the global liberal institutions become faulty when applied forcefully to the democratisation process in Africa with a compliance strategy attached to IMF and World Bank conditionality using civil societies to orchestrate the process as the best practice. The problem of liberal democracy lays in its global exchange of best practice ideas to determine the good, the bad and the ugly of democracy relevant to the collective 'us', while struggling to sustain our individuality within the collectivity.

Development of an educated middle class may be relevant in some contexts and it may be irrelevant in others. This is where 'best fit' surpasses the 'best practice' assumption of liberal democracy. It is the best-fit approach that separates the popular uprisings in the sub-Sahara Africa in 1980s and the Arab Spring especially Libya. The 1980s protests in places like Benin Republic and Cameroon, left the infrastructures of the old regimes in place while the Arab Spring is about the state-rebirth with different ideological postures. The Libyans unlike the Egyptians and Tunisians completely dismantled the former regime's apparatus through a nine month bitter fighting and popular struggle that gave the rebels control of the country having defeated Colonel Gaddafi's security and military forces with the support of NATO.

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[21] Mundy, K and Murphy, L, Transnational Advocacy, Global Civil Society? Emerging Evidence from the Field of Education in H. Lander; P. Brown; J.A Dillabough; and A.H. Halsey eds., Education, Globalisation and Social Change (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)
[22] P.C Schmitter and T L Karl: 'What democracy is and is not', Journal of Democracy,
National Endowment for Democracy and the Johns Hopkins University. Summer 1991

The protesters in Egypt had to engage in another round of struggle with the transition leaders in furtherance of the realisation of a new state with new orientation. A major factor that determines the intensity and direction of the revolution in the Arab Spring is who controls the levers of power in the popular struggle between the Salafists group and the Muslim Brotherhood[23]. This was in contrary to the "intellectual interlocutors" that mid-wifed the popular protests in 1980s in the sub-Sahara Africa

The Cold War and the African scholars' response to popular struggles for democracy

Popular political crisis in African states have proved wrong the assumption of liberal democracy that having regular multi-party elections will guarantee the establishment of a democratic state. In liberal democratic parlance, no state can be said to be democratic if it does not pass through the litmus test of 'best practice' that is; holding regular elections according to a set of rules that are regarded as fair, especially by the 'international observers' to the political parties involved, even when these rules, processes and institutions of the elections are manipulated to the advantage of the ruling party and the elections are fraught with fraudulence. Mafeje[24] roundly debunked the assumption of equating multi-party elections with democracy in Africa.

He based his submission on the fact that popular struggles for democracy in Africa have been subjected to the 'perversion or appropriation by more articulate interlocutors who range from imperialist agents, liberals of all sorts to intellectual opportunists'. He argues …it is important to note that the ordinary citizens who were responsible for what became known as "the popular movement for democracy in Africa" knew exactly what they were objecting to, but they did not know with the same clarity what they wanted. Thus, their popular slogans were open to conflicting interpretations, depending on who the interlocutors were. For instance, objection to one party autocracy got interpreted as "multi-party democracy" democratic pluralism got construed as "liberal democracy", and local autonomy as "participatory democracy", which got associated with development without saying what type of development[25].

These misinterpretations by the various interlocutors as argued by Mafeje, are inevitable due to the presence of some determinate conditions such as "uneven development" provided by the "nature company"[26]. However, the greatest advantage of these misinterpretations is grounded in their historical significance that provides grounds for a socially–informed debate among the African intellectuals from 1986 to date. Taking a queue after Mafeje was Jephias Mapuva[27] who draws our attention to the fact that it was not until the intensification of popular struggles for democracy in the 1970s and 1980s that African scholars started paying sufficient attention to the question of democracy in Africa. Initially, African scholars were not unduly worried about "one-party state" or "parti-unique" but more about the failures of the African states to deliver the promises of independence.[28]

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[23] See Acil Tabbara" 'Hardliners Spring: From Tunisia to Egypt, Salafists stretch their wings" Middle East online 2012-09-16
[24] Mafeje, Democracy, Civil Society and Governance in Africa', Workshop on 'Social Policy, Development and Governance in Kenya', Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 23-26 November 1999
[25] op cit p.4
[26] Neil Smith, "The production of nature" in Future Naural, G. Roberston; M. Mash; L, Tickner; J, Bird; B. Curtis; T. Putnam eds; USA: Taylor & Francis. 2005
[27] Mapuva, J, 'Challenges to the Democratisation Process in Africa'. Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa Vol. 12 No2, (2010)
[28] op cit 17

They started paying full attention to the growing disillusionment associated with these failures that reached an articulated crescendo in the 1980s. This was when the euphoria that greeted independence had completely evaporated with enactment of draconian 'legislations and policies reminiscent of the colonial period.'[29]Prior to these events, it was generally believed that the 'progressive' African leaders who were commonly referred to as the 'Casablanca Group' comprising of Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, and Modibo Keita would bring independence to its fruition irrespective of whether they were advocates of one-party state or multi-party.

The underlying reason for this conviction was that the independence movements led by these leaders were popular and mass based movements that gave the people rays of hope in an independent state. It was when the popular trust in these leaders began to dwindle due to some remarkable economic and social events within ten years after independence that the African scholars began to examine the democratic credentials of their states and leaders. The states could not halt the popular struggles for democracy due to the inability to possess the monopoly of instruments of violence [30] and that what are commonly referred to as states are 'hand-me-down' political organisations with some public authority which lacked the capacity to intervene in the economic development as envisaged in the Lagos Plan of Action.

The Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) which based its principles on the following principles as discussed by Olateju[31], provided the self-sufficiency economic development compass for the African states. These principles use:

- Self reliance as the basis of development – at the national, sub-regional and regional levels;
- Equity in the distribution of wealth at the national level as a fundamental objective of development;
- Expansion of the Public sector viewed as essential for development;
- As an unavoidable necessity, outside capital was to be directed to
- those areas where African capital is lacking or inadequate – such as mining, energy and large scale projects;
- Inter-African economic cooperation and integration, being essential, was to be effected as soon as possible;
- Change in the international economic order to favour Africa and Third World countries being essential, Africa should continue to fight for a New International Economic Order.

Towards the realisation of the LPA, African Governments gave priority attention to the development of

- Agriculture (first for food and then for export),
- Industrialisation (to satisfy basic needs),
- Mining Industries (to recover total and permanent sovereignty over national resources, and establish mineral based industries),
- Human Resources, and
- Science and Technology

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[29] op cit 19

[30] Olatunji Olateju Democratisation without states: Lessons from Africa APCJ Vol. 5 No 1 pp.28 – 37 June 2012

[31] Olatunji Olateju, AU and state of democracy in Africa: The need to reconfigure African states and democracy, Conference proceedings of the 8th Iberia Conference of African Studies: From OAU to AU: The New Millennium and the state of Democracy in Africa. FUAM, Spain. June 14-16 2012. 357-54-1-SP

The LPA was followed by the desire of the African leaders to have a common market by the year 2000 as a practical step towards economic cooperation and integration. Without the economic integration of the small national economies of the African states, it would be impossible to achieve any meaningful alternative development as a way out of the crises. More importantly, without such cooperation and integration, Africa will not be strong enough to bring about any change, however small, in the existing international economic order. And such a change is crucial if Africa is to have any meaningful space to embark on an alternative form of development and overcome its crises.

Before 1980 most African scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney Nzogola Ntalaja etc; were pre-occupied with the cold war effects on the underdevelopment of Africa, ideological competition between capitalism and Marxism and the role of workers and peasants in development[32]. The cold war confrontation not only "disfigured" the liberation and democratic discourse in Africa, it turned the newly and fledging independent states into pawns, and the continent into a chessboard, of proxy hot wars. The consequences of those hot wars have been devastating for the continent.

Today's failed states   such as Zimbabwe, Somalia, Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire, Sierra-Leone, Central African Republic, Uganda etc; were once upon a time the darlings or demons – depending on the point of view one takes of the global hegemonic powers. The overconcentration on the Cold War diverted the attention of most African scholars from the domestic struggles of Africans for genuine democracy[33]. This neglect provided a good ground for the dictatorial regimes to consolidate their grips on power with the idea of 'life presidency or emperors. ' .

The popular democratic waves of the 1980s were unprecedented since the colonial struggles for independence. These events swept through the African continent forcing changes in political arrangements and leading to multi-party democracy a new emphasis on human rights, dialogue between political opponents, and the liberalisation of the post-colonial politics[34]. The events also included the reactions of the people to the attempts by the post-colonial rulers at protecting their profligacy. In achieving this protection, the post-colonial rulers put in place laws and policies that deny the ordinary citizens the right to protest against the implicit but illegitimate financial squeeze[35].

This in turn resulted in governments not only losing legitimacy but shrinking the support base of the rulers to a narrow circle of trusted friends, kinsmen and ethnic associates all of whom had survived on the political patronage of the ruling elite[36]. This situation effectively elicits large-scale upheavals[37] and struggles for democracy from below by the people but articulated by the civil societies, organised labour and students associations. Democracy from thereon assumes a new dimension in Africa with challenges.

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[32] Mafeje, A, Theory of Democracy and the African discourse in E. Chole and J. Ibrahim, Democratization Processes in Africa: Problems and Prospects. (CODESRIA Book Series, Dakar ,1998)

[33] World Bank, Governance: The World Bank's Experience, (Washington, D.C: World Bank. 2004, 2007)

[34] Hyden, G and Bratton, M, Governance and Politics in Africa, (Lynne Rienner: Boulder, Colorado.Hyden and Bratton, 1992); Mamdani, M. & Wamba dia Wamba, E, African studies in Social Movements and Democracy. (CODESRIA Book Series, Dakar, 1995)

[35] Shivji, I, "The Pitfalls of the Debate on Democracy" CODESRIA Bulletin,13 (1989)

[36] Op cit 18; Wamba dia Wamba, "Africa is Searching for a New Historical Model of Politics". Proceedings Conference on democratization Process in Africa of CODESRIA, Dakar, 1992, 1995

[37] op cit 24

The articulated struggles by the civil society groups revolved around three major issues which are the quest for multi-party democracy as against one-party arrangement, power devolution and decentralization from the centre to lower tiers of government and respect for rule of law and human rights by the African governments[38]. These demands reflect the level of revulsion of the people against corrupt leaders who had become progressively oppressive and ruthless dictators[39] that had plunged the state economies into crisis and the countries into political abyss[40].

Involvement of civil society groups in these revulsions (mis)presented the revulsions as struggles for multi-party liberal democracy thereby blind-folded us from the indigeneity of the struggles. African scholars were unanimous in their conclusion that democracy is any phenomena based on participation of citizens in political debates and consultation on democratic decision-making[41]. This is in contrast to tailor-made procedures, processes and institutions of the universal grand theories that issue "birth or death certificate" to democracy in every nation. African scholars' assumption is based on the principle of those to be affected by a given decision must have the right to participate in the making of such decision.

Bingu Wa Mutharika, the late Malawian President (2004 – 2012) however pointed out the insufficiency of people's participation in decision making process as a guarantee for democratic assurance. He averred that ' …the masses can still be oppressed by the system or excluded from the decision-making process by the same system they have installed and that human right abuses can still take place even under plural democracy'[42].

The fear expressed by Bingu Wa Mutharika was what Mapuva sees as the reason for engaging civil society as an appropriate shield against the oppression of the people in a multi-party democracy and a good catalyst for the promotion of democratic institutions in Africa[43]. But does this solve the problem? Botswana, inspite of the presence of civil societies, through its Botswana Democratic Party - ruling party, still oppresses and excludes those that are affected by a given decision from participating in the decision making process, even though it retains the status of a good model of liberal and stable democracy in Africa.

Following Mutharika's fears, the multi-party democracy creates some democratic challenges for post-colonial African states due to its inherent contradictions and the class structures of the liberal state. For example, the conventional first-past-the-post method of determining the winner in an election assumes a new dimension with supplementary or run-off elections appearing in the African political lexicon. This is a situation where a winner is regarded to have won an election but not with sufficient votes to be declared the winner. This is similar to Parliamentary hung parliament, where neither of the major political parties has an absolute majority in the legislature to form the government.

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[38]op cit 24

[39] Op cit 29

[40] Op cit 19

[41] Mandaza, I. & Sachikonye, L. (ed.) The One-Party State and Democracy: The Zimbabwe Debate. (Harare: SAPES Books 1991)

[42] Mutharika, B.W.T, One Africa, One Destiny: Towards Democracy, Good Governance, and
Development (SAPES Books: Harare, 1995)

[43] op cit 20

This was the case in Zimbabwe in March 2008 when the opposition won the elections but needed to face another round of election dubbed run-off. The same scenario was observed in Nigeria May 2011 when an opposition won a governorship election in Imo state and another opposition candidate won a Senatorial election in Enugu state but their elections were declared inconclusive by the Independent Electoral Commission and each was made to recontest on a run-off arrangement A new political jargon dubbed Coalition or Government of National Unity (GNU) also appears in African political dictionary. This is a political arrangement that exposes the weak side of liberal democracy.

GNU which is most visible in Zimbabwe, Kenya and Nigeria (federal level only) not only short-changed the electorates but also forced the winners to share the stage with losers[44] thereby depriving the electorates the right to determine their ultimate leaders and representatives through the ballot box. The GNU does not only weaken democracy by depriving the political process of vibrant opposition but also turns the state into a one-party arrangement through the nack door as most of the co-opted parties not only support the ruling government policies and programmes, they sometimes end up as members of the ruling party. Nigeria is a clear example of this.

GNU started in 1979 with National Party of Nigeria (NPN, the ruling party) and Nigeria's Peoples' Party (NPP) constituting the government. NPP lost its representatives in the government to NPN. Similar attempt was made in 2007 and all the parties in the arrangement with Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) such as Progressive Peoples Alliance (PPA) and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) suffered the same fate. ANPP started with five governors and ended with two, while PPA started with two and the two defected to PDP. Presently, there are no opposition parties in Nigeria in the true sense of the concept of opposition.

All the political parties in the legislature have their members either as officers or members of the various select Committees of the the two national chambers dominated by the PDP, the ruling party. They through this act of omission or commission, implement the ruling party's programmes. They not only shut the door at alternative views to issues but also shortchange the electorates that voted for these minority parties based on programme choice. These self-made arrangements and amendments are not only parts of the domestic responses of the African states to the failures of liberal democracy in addressing the political peculiarities of the African societies but also part of the democratic struggles by the state in its search for political stability. These efforts serve as further revelations that democracy can never be devoid of history and context but which the civil society groups in Africa are yet to accept.

Crisis of transitions

Africa is no doubt still undergoing a development transition which other continents had gone through. In addition to this the continent is also facing the challenges of political transitions in general and regime transition crisis specifically. By regime transition, I mean a shift from one set of political procedure to another or from an old pattern of rule to a new one as the current situation in Libya. Indeed, it is the most colourful aspect of political transition because it adds activity and glamour to the whole process; yet it can be the most stressful, turbulent, tense period. This is because it results in uncertainties among individuals and groups, through the opening up of new opportunities for political access, ascent and competition, as well as for venting grievances, conflicts, hatred and seeking redress of some hitherto perceived injustice, such as marginalization.

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[44] Op cit 35

Transition crises in Africa are rooted in both the internal and external causes. Internally, transitions in Africa are afflicted by intra-elites power struggles that breed inter-ethnic or inter-religious violence. Externally, economic interests of Cold War mentors still remain a strong factor in the transitions of power in Africa. Transitions in Africa have witnessed two types of rulers. These are those over-staying and those under-staying their tenure. For instance, Tanzania President, Julius Nyerere, ruled for 24 years (1961-1985); Kenya's President, Jomo Kenyatta, ruled for 15 years (1963-1978); followed by President Arap Moi, who had 24 years (1978-2002). Mr Mugabe has been ruling Zimbabwe since independence in 1980 (31years).

Libya's Ghadaffi ruled from 1969 before being swept aside by the NATO backed militants in 2011. He ruled for 42 years. In Uganda, the first 24 years after Independence (1962-1986) witnessed five abrupt changes that involved eight transitions (eight Presidents), implying an average of three years' tenure per President, until when Mr Kaguta Museveni came to power. He is now in his 27th year as president and had just (on 20/02/11) won an additional term of 5 years. In Nigeria, transitions from one democratic government to another have always being tumultuous right from independence, The list continues to include Algeria, Sudan, Tunisia, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo Niger, Mali, Somalia, Guinea, Gabon, Cameroun, to mention but a few.

Can the transitions' difficulties in the Africa be interpreted as undergoing a team-building process? Probably yes, if we mapped the continent into the phases of team-building. The first phase of team-building is the formation/familiarization phase that is characterised by group awareness and relationship-building, including passive conduct, laying down ground rules (Constitutions), and less activity. Africa has passed this stage during the first 25 years after Independence. The second phase is the storming / charge phase, which is dominated by more activity, power play, confrontation, ambiguity, negativity, finding faults and recognition of the need for dominance and attempts to achieve same. This is the phase most countries in Africa are in; hence the crises..

Pertinent question that readily agitates the minds of concerned scholars in African crisis is why do African leaders prefer to overstay in power? When African Presidents take up positions, many of them assume absolute power. "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely"[45]. Absolute power creates dictators who commit hideous acts such as closing up political space, creating a lopsided political field, framing up political opponents, personalising state resources, skewing distribution of national wealth/appointments, awarding bogus contracts, misappropriating funds/corruption, tribalism/ethnicity, nepotism, repealing/amending Constitutions, to mention but a few.

Consequently, such leaders prefer to stay in power, not for the comfort of it, but for fear of what may happen if they are out of power. For such leaders , remaining in office and dying there is less risky, less dangerous and less embarrassing than vacating it and facing the consequences of their misdeeds, such as Moammar Gaddafi of Libya who after ruling for forty-two years, went into war of power sustenance with his people and NATO forces, but lost his life in the process Similarly, the fear of the UN Special Courts for trying dictators for crimes against humanity while in office contributes to sit tight character of the dictator-presidents. Rather than facing at such courts, the repercussions of their dictatorial actions and misdeeds while in office, they would rather create "conducive" environment that allows tenure elongation as life presidents.

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[45] Lord Acton in a letter to Mandell Creighton dated 5 April 1887 published in Historical Essays and Studies (1907). Speak Truth to Power and in American Friends Service Committee in Speak Truth to Power: A Quaker Search for an Alternative to Violence 1955.

Furthermore, some leaders assume power from financially impoverished states. Logically, such people are expected to share the plight of the poor, but indeed the opposite obtains. A person in this situation experiences a complete change of lifestyle from ordinary to extravagant style, which he is not too willing to relinquish. This leads to demand for more terms/extension of terms, amendment of the Constitutions or/and claim of rigging when the opposition thrash them in elections.Naturally when a leader accedes to power through the might of the gun or merciless rigging, there is a high tendency of developing the feelings of 'I am the most powerful in the land'.

This is also true in a situation of vote-trading where voters exchange their votes for pitiable gifts such as salt, soap, oil or jewellery and the like. In a situation such as this, the ruling elites feel they are unaccountable to the voting population, since the votes had been exchanged for something; implying that accountability started and ended during elections. This is what international observers alleged in the recent Ugandan elections that were at the same time adjudged to be free, safe and transparent. As far as vote trade bore fruits at the first attempt, the strategy will continue in all subsequent elections to ensure total grip of power and government for as long as the strategy lasts.

There is a vicious inability of incumbents to understand the distinction between crowds and supporters when a sitting president is on a campaign tour. It is normal that everyone would want to have a glimpse of that popular/common name in the media. A situation such as this brings forth a mammoth crowd which does not necessarily translate to supporters. It only misleads the incumbent to believe that he is popular. Therefore, when he is defeated at elections, he cites rigging by the opponents. This posture has created the impression in the minds of many that the search for democracy in Africa has reached a dead end as the continent constantly witnesses the resurgence of despots who hardly allow the democratic transition to take place by either manipulating the electoral processes or completely abandon any transition project that will relieve them of their positions.

Nigeria presents a vivid example of manipulated electoral processes that imposed rulers on the people. International Crisis Group[46] reveals that Nigeria as a nation has engineered three flawed elections – 1999, that heralded the Fourth Republic, 2003 and 2007, the last being the most discredited, yet rulers were produced. The 2015 polls are very critical for Nigeria's fledgling democracy and overall political health. In a spirited efforts to show its preparedness and impartiality, the Independent national Electoral Commission instituted some important reforms; including introduction of community–mandate-protection to prevent electoral malpractice; and to the surprise of everybody and for the first time in Nigeria, prosecution and sentencing of officials, including the electoral body's own staff, for electoral offences.

However "there were grounds for pessimism flawed voter registration exercise, poor functioning biometric scanners, inflated voters roll[47], lack of internal democracy in all the political parties, partisanship of some security personnel involved in the elections etc. Combination of all these anomalies resulted in the upsurge of violence in several states that accompanied the election results.

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[46] International Crisis Group Report No 81 "Lessons from Nigeria's 2011 Elections"
[47] Op cited 46

Conclusion

In a reflection on the setbacks to the transition projects in Africa, some have concluded that democracy could not in the first instance have a good chance of survival in Africa because there are some cultural values that inhibit its emergence and sustenance. They are wrong. They failed to explain whose democracy and which democracy failed to survive in Africa. As I have discussed earlier those external factors in the process of imposing best practice ideology that makes Africa susceptible to crisis of various kinds, could not be exonerated from the transition crisis in Africa. If we look at the political changes which occurred between 1980s and 1990s in Africa, it will be seen that those changes were essentially donor-driven prompted by the donors collective instrument of intervention – IMF and the World Bank.

The intervention further driven Africa to the periphery of the periphery of the global economic calculations and this did not only stultified the economic development of the African states but also the democratic projects. The overall effects of this were the series of uprising from the people clamouring for regime change, power devolution or decentralisation. The uprising in turn elicited extreme autocratic measures from the rulers whose leadership credentials were not only questioned but threatened. As Decalo argues "...the majority of Africa, in the absence of global fiscal munificence may...once the international vogue with "democracy" recedes – be cut loose to drift their own way, sliding back to their into political strife, dictatorship and military rule"[48].

Along this line of thought and for different reasons, some contributors went to the extreme of suggesting that what Africa actually requires is a "Second Colonisation" as it appears that most countries in Africa cannot take charge of their own destiny[49]. For progressive African scholars, such conclusion on Africa is based on lack of understanding of African politics and governance on the part of those clamouring for the re-colonisation of Africa. The position is that although democratic transitions remained endangered, there is nothing that makes democracy un-African or that makes Africans ungovernable. Democracy as a concept is universal but it does not endorse the imposition of the best-practice idea rather it gives room for the best-fit approach.

There is nothing to suggest that the basic values of democracy are alien to Africa or diametrically opposed to African social values and culture but rather it is the disconnection with those social values by the imposition of liberal democracy that put democracy on fire in Africa. The problem which should form the basis of any inquiry into the political and transition crisis in Africa is to, as raised by Momoh and Adejumobi[50] pose the question: "Why did the political transition programme in most African countries run into cul-de-sac? What variables or factors can explain the crisis of democracy in Africa"? Answers to these questions are left for further studies.

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[48] Decalo, Samuel, The future of Participatory in Africa. Futures, 26(9), 1994

[49] Mafeje, Archie, 'Theory of Democracy and the African Discourse: Breaking Bread with my Fellow Travelers' in Eshetu, Cole; and Jibrin Ibrahim eds; Democratisation Processes in Africa: Problems and Prospects, (Dakar: CODESRIA, 31, 1995)

[50]Momoh Abubakar and Adjumobi, Saheed; The Nigeria Military and the Crisis of Democratic Transition (Lagos- Nigeria. Civil Liberties Organization, 1999)