

Democracy and Multi-Party Politics in Africa

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AUTHORITARIAN leaders and single-party régimes of all shades increasingly came under great pressures between 1990 and 1993 to liberalise and permit more participation in the political process. This transformation, which was part of what Samuel Huntington described as 'the third wave of democratisation',¹ stemmed from sustained efforts by domestic political forces in African states, albeit assisted by a variety of demanded requirements from international financial institutions and industrialised countries, as well as by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. According to the US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, the 'new resolve to establish new attitudes, arrangements and structures' came directly out of the exhaustion of the cold war.² In other words, the promotion of democracy in Africa was part of the so-called peace dividend.³ Expectations for political evolution throughout the world were so high that some analysts predicted the emergence of 'an international democratic order'.⁴ As Keith Somerville has observed: 'Africa entered the 1990s in a mood of hope and expectation'.⁵

Most attempts to introduce Western-style democracy have created problems for both leaders and voters with no experience of operating in open and competitive political systems. It has exposed the weaknesses in the structures and performance of the public institutions of many states, and shown the connection between authoritarian rule and political tensions. Most African countries which have recently

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¹ See Samuel P. Huntington, 'How Countries Democratize', in *Political Science Quarterly* (New York), 106, 4, Winter 1991-92, pp. 579-616.

² Strobe Talbott, 'The New Geopolitics: defending democracy in the post-cold war era', in *The World Today* (London), 51, 1, January 1995, p. 7.

³ See, for example, Gilbert M. Khadiagala, 'Thoughts on Africa and the New World Order', in *The Round Table* (London), 324, October 1992, pp. 431-50.

⁴ Thomas M. Franck, 'The Emerging Right to Democratic Governance', in *The American Journal of International Law* (Washington, DC), 86, 1, 1993, pp. 46-91.

⁵ Keith Somerville, 'Africa: is there a silver lining?', in *The World Today*, 50, 11, November 1994, p. 215.

experienced serious conflicts have been undemocratic, with weak and undeveloped systems of government and administration. The inadequacies of African state structures have combined with corruption, dictatorial rule, and the marginalisation of some ethnic groups to generate deeply-felt antagonisms.⁶

At the heart of the demand for political liberalisation in Africa have been human rights abuses, gender inequity, economic stagnation, ethnic clashes, and institutional weaknesses. Given the assumption that these serious problems can be tackled effectively only by responsible, open, and democratic régimes, why have most African states been unable to sustain Western-style systems? What impact has external pressures had on internal political change? Should democracy always be equated with multi-party politics? This article will attempt to address these very demanding questions in the process of explaining the pitfalls of, and the prospects for, liberal democracy in Angola, Kenya, and Rwanda. In colonial/cultural terms, these three states represent lusophone, anglophone, and francophone Africa, respectively.

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

There is no clinical or scientific definition of liberal democracy, but some of the main features are free competition among political parties, periodic elections, and respect for the fundamental freedoms of thought, expression, and assembly. There is plenty of evidence that such a system of government has the potential to encourage political stability and accountability, and to help consolidate public institutions.

However, the introduction of liberal democracy continues to be viewed with suspicion and fear by those who hold power in many African states. When the former Nigerian military ruler, General Ibrahim Babangida, agreed to transfer power to civilians in 1993, he stipulated that elections could only be contested by two officially-authorized national organisations, and proposed other conditions in order to ensure that multi-party politics was contained within certain limits. But, the Nigerian military leadership refused to hand over power after the elections when it realised that the outcome was not what it had expected,⁷ and the President was soon replaced by his former defence minister, General Sani Abacha. In Nigeria, military leaders and some

⁶ Cf. Oliver Furley (ed.), *Conflict in Africa* (London, 1995).

⁷ *Africa Confidential* (London), 34, 15, 30 July 1993, and 34, 17, 27 August 1993.

politicians have worked hard for many years to prevent the creation of a free and fairly elected government.⁸

Liberal democracy is also feared by those in power in other parts of the continent. In Uganda, for example, Yoweri Museveni, who was re-elected President in May 1996, favours a representative system of government based on consensus, but considers multi-partyism to be unacceptably confrontational and divisive.⁹ He and other critics have argued consistently that democracy should not necessarily be equated with political pluralism, because several parties can exist in a society which does not respect the fundamental principles of competition. They also believe that since the concept of representation in Africa includes the family and the economic unit, it is wider than generally perceived in the West where the emphasis is on individuals and organised interest groups.

The dominant cultural values of any society, together with its ethnic composition, level of education, and economic system, are important determinants of its political ideas and institutions. Since representation in Western societies is often (but not always) shaped by class interests and organised groups, political divisions tend to assume a horizontal dimension. However, in African countries, where established classes or interest groups are relatively weak, representation is often based on ethnic or religious affiliations. In such societies, political divisions tend to be vertical, since members of an ethnic group often band together irrespective of their class status.

In general terms, democracy can be seen as a way of government firmly rooted in the belief that people in any society should be free to determine their own political, economic, social, and cultural systems. But the form it takes can vary according to the particular circumstances of any society. Indeed, whereas the principles of democracy are universal, their expression and practice cannot be transplanted wholesale from one community to another. Most African societies do not have a tradition of liberal democracy, and those leaders who took power after independence destroyed whatever checks and balances their constitutions contained. Some of the liberal democratic structures, including multi-party systems, which these states have been required to establish in the 1990s are not familiar to most of the inhabitants. It is,

⁸ Julius O. Ihonvbere, *Nigeria: the politics of adjustment and democracy* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1994), and 'Are Things Falling Apart? The Military and the Crisis of Democratization in Nigeria', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (Cambridge), 34, 2, June 1996, pp. 193-225.

⁹ Bill Berkeley, 'An African Success Story?', in *Atlantic Monthly* (Boston), September 1994, pp. 22-30.

therefore, hard to see how a stable Western-type democracy can exist if the structures through which ordinary people are expected to express their decisions are unfamiliar to them. It is equally difficult to see how a society can exact accountability from its political leaders and civil servants if its population cannot clearly differentiate public from private issues, and is not well-informed.

BACKGROUND TO THE PREDICAMENTS

There are several internal and external reasons for Africa's complex socio-economic and political problems. The first is that democracy was denied to Africans for about a century, and that any opposition to European rule was ruthlessly crushed. The second is that owing to the international division of labour, the continent has always been at the periphery of world political and economic systems. The third is Africa's lack of economic, scientific, and technological infrastructures, and the fourth is the cultural dimension of poverty, underdevelopment, injustice, and authoritarianism. To make matters worse, the first generation of post-independence leaders in many states based their régimes on ethnic, linguistic, and regional support. It is partly these factors that help to explain the drawn-out civil war in Angola, the uncertainty of liberal democracy in Kenya, and the tragic failure of a multi-party experiment in Rwanda.

1. *Angola*

The failure of the country's two major political parties – the ruling *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) and the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (Unita) – to find an acceptable working formula for many years, has to be understood against the fact that Portugal never expected to relinquish control over its system of government and administration. Virtually all future leaders were excluded from the political process, and no group was equipped to establish a liberal democracy when Angola achieved independence in 1975.

The exiled leaders of the main liberation movements, the MPLA, Unita, and the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA), had not been exposed to multi-party politics, and were bitterly divided over power-sharing. The lasting lesson they had learnt from the colonial system was that the winners excluded the losers from the corridors of power. So, as the date of independence approached, they sought

weapons and allies to wage war against their rivals. As the best-managed and most disciplined organisation, the MPLA, supported by the USSR and Cuba, took Luanda, the capital, and declared itself the Government. Unita was supported by China and South Africa, while the FNLA, which had well-developed links with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) through its bases in Zaïre, was aided by the United States.¹⁰

After the FNLA had virtually disintegrated, Unita received some American assistance when Jonas Savimbi decided to fight a guerrilla war against the Cuban and Soviet-supported MPLA in an effort to wrest power from, not to share power with, the régime headed by José Eduardo dos Santos in Luanda. After coming under pressure from the Soviet Union to withdraw its forces from Angola, Cuba signed an agreement with Angola and South Africa in December 1988 that called for the removal of South African troops from southern Angola and the phased withdrawal of Cuban forces. Even so, the MPLA and Unita continued fighting until May 1991, when their leaders signed an accord at Bicesse in Portugal that provided for a cease-fire, a transition to peaceful political competition, and multi-party elections under UN supervision. Apart from the fact that both battle-hardened movements had no experience or knowledge of being participants in a multi-party system, the agreement also failed to take into account the deep hatred and suspicions between their leaders.

As required by the Bicesse accord, the UN Security Council authorised the establishment of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission. The 350 military observers and 90 police monitors had the demanding mandate of overseeing the confinement of 124,000 MPLA troops and an unknown number (23,000 to 70,000) of Unita guerrillas in 46 assembly points, as well as their disarmament and demobilisation. As for the 400 election supervisors, they had to monitor the polls throughout a vast country which had never had free elections before. The Portuguese colonial authorities had departed quickly without making arrangements for a peaceful transition to democratic rule, and the ensuing civil war had been exacerbated by foreign interventions, personal ambitions, ideological differences, and ethnic loyalties.

¹⁰ John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: a CIA story* (New York, 1978).

2. Kenya

Following independence from Britain in December 1963, the major political parties were the ruling Kenya African National Union (Kanu) and the opposition Kenya African Democratic Union (Kadu). However, the latter dissolved itself at the end of 1964, thereby leaving Kanu as the sole party until 1966, when its Vice-President, Oginga Odinga, resigned and established the Kenya People's Union (KPU). The second multi-party system lasted until 1969, when President Jomo Kenyatta banned the KPU, allegedly on grounds of internal security, and for the next 13 years Kenya was a *de facto* one-party state. Without a competitor, Kanu became so inactive during this period that Kenya looked like a 'no-party' state until 1982, when President Daniel arap Moi, fearing the establishment of a rival party, changed the constitution by making Kenya a *de jure* one-party state.

Given the hard-line attitudes taken by both Presidents in relation to political competition, it could be argued that the destruction of liberal democracy was the responsibility of the Governments of Kenyatta (1963–78) and Moi (since 1978). In the 1960s and 1970s, although Kenyatta theoretically permitted the existence of rival parties, his régime harassed opposition politicians, imprisoning some on flimsy grounds, and making it extremely difficult for anyone to organise a political forum. Even Kanu MPs faced dangers if they voiced their reservations too clearly. For instance, in 1975, after Martin Shikuku had alleged that some powerful individuals were seeking to emasculate Parliament along the lines that had virtually destroyed Kanu, and after the Deputy Speaker, Jean-Marie Seroney, had said in response to a governmental challenge that there was no need to substantiate what was obvious, both men were arrested two days later and detained indefinitely without trial.

After taking power in August 1978 following Kenyatta's death, Moi became increasingly suspicious of other politicians and drastically curtailed freedom of expression. Many critics were detained between 1982 and 1991, including university students, lecturers, lawyers, clergy, and business people. Indeed, for nearly a decade Moi did not tolerate any criticism of his régime, and regarded any effort to organise an opposition political party as treason. However, in November 1991, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, with the support of some Western countries, insisted that Kenya would not receive further aid until the Government had carried out political and economic reforms. By this time, an organisation called the Forum for

the Restoration of Democracy (Ford) had been established to champion reforms, although it would not call itself a political party for fear of breaking the law.¹¹

3. *Rwanda*

Instability in Rwanda stemmed from the colonial past but also from the misguided policies of the dictatorial post-independence leaders and their politically-engineered ethnic competition.¹² Belgium's strategy of divide-and-rule succeeded in creating a layered society in which Europeans at the top favoured the minority Tutsi and helped to buttress their feudal system at the expense of the majority Hutu. Given that both speak the same language and have similar customs – which suggests that there are few, if any, 'ethnic' differences between Tutsi and Hutu – the Rwandan tragedy should also be seen in terms of unequal access to political and economic power.

Prior to independence in 1962, and especially between 1959 and 1961, Belgium switched its patronage to the Hutu, who rebelled against the Tutsi. Their monarch was deposed and forced into exile with his supporters. The bloodshed that occurred in 1994 was partly due to the fact that the offspring of the exiled Tutsi wanted to return to Rwanda and share power with the Hutu. It was also testimony to the failure of the political élite from the two ethnic groups to find an acceptable formula for reconciliation.

While the civil war drove ordinary Hutu and Tutsi apart, it also exacerbated the hatred that had arisen between southern and northern Hutu politicians, led respectively by Grégoire Kayibanda and Juvénal Habyarimana. The former, as Rwanda's first President from 1962 to 1973, had concentrated political power among southerners, but following Habyarimana's military coup in 1973, the army's officer corps were mainly northern Hutu. Thereafter, many revolted against President Habyarimana's dictatorial rule because of their yearning for democracy and justice. His supporters manipulated ethnicity to cover up their violations of human rights, and the majority of Hutu who had been denied justice were persuaded to accept their oppressors as saviours and to see Tutsi as enemies who should be exterminated.

¹¹ Samuel M. Makinda, 'Kenya: out of the straightjacket, slowly', in *The World Today*, 48, 10, October 1992, pp. 188–92.

¹² David Dorward, 'Rwanda and Burundi: the politics of ethnicity and the psychology of victimisation', in *Current Affairs Bulletin* (Sydney), 71, 1, June–July 1994, pp. 31–8.

The *Front patriotique rwandais* (FPR), which had been formed by exiled Tutsi in Uganda in 1987,¹³ invaded Rwanda in October 1990, with a view to defeating the *Mouvement révolutionnaire national pour le développement* (MRND), dominated by northern Hutu. Although this incursion was repulsed by the Rwandan army, with support from Belgium, France, and Zaïre, Habyarimana came under increased pressure to reform the political system and agreed to negotiate with the FPR. The leaders of the two sides travelled to Arusha in Tanzania, where they signed a wide-ranging agreement in August 1993, calling for a cease-fire, the creation of a transitional government, and the return of refugees. The principal purpose of the Arusha accord was to create a participatory, multi-party democracy in which a government could be voted out of power and opposition parties could function freely. It was on the basis of this agreement that the Security Council authorised in October 1993 the establishment of the UN Assistance Mission to Rwanda, whose mandate was, *inter alia*, to monitor the observance of the cease-fire agreement, the repatriation of refugees, and 'the security situation during the final period of the transitional government's mandate, leading up to the elections'.¹⁴ These have not yet been held.



Although Angola, Kenya, and Rwanda have different colonial legacies, their patterns of political development reveal intriguing similarities. In all three countries the impetus for change during the past few years had come from within, while Western governments and donors, and the end of the cold war, have served as components of the external stimuli.

INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES

In the past, liberal democracy in Africa has been abetted or hindered by extraneous forces. During the cold war, for example, the United States and the Soviet Union, supported by their allies, embraced African dictators in their competition for global influence. Western governments and media turned a blind eye to human rights violations by régimes which supported the West (such as Zaïre, Kenya, and the Sudan). A former US President, Jimmy Carter, admitted this in May

¹³ See Wm. Cyrus Reed, 'Exile, Reform, and the Rise of the Rwandan Patriotic Front', in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34, 3, September 1996, pp. 479-501.

¹⁴ UN Security Council Resolution 872 of 5 October 1993.

1977 when he said 'we are now free of that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in our fear'.¹⁵ However, American support for authoritarian régimes continued until the late 1980s. For example, US aid to Kenya increased in the mid-1980s after Moi had abolished the multi-party constitution and weakened the independence of the judiciary. It was only after the end of the cold war that Western governments became relatively more aloof in their dealings with African states.

Policy-makers in Europe and North America have increasingly championed liberal democracy as if it could be applied almost anywhere regardless of a country's history, traditions, and level of development. They have promoted a Western-type application of democratic power as a panacea for Africa's political and economic problems, while non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also jumped on the bandwagon to champion similar reforms. But why have they all been so keen to see the introduction of multi-party politics in the 1990s? On the surface, it would appear as if the goal is to help Africans enjoy democracy and the accompanying political and civil liberties. The pressures for reform have been coupled with references to four principal issues: human rights, responsible and accountable governments, an end to corruption, and strong public institutions. Indeed, some analysts would like to see a Western-type democratisation of the whole world. David Held, for example, has argued that democracy 'can be fully sustained only... through the agencies and organisations that... cut across the territorial boundaries of the nation-state'. However, the promotion of 'cosmopolitan democracy' in Africa has not been accompanied by the envisioned institutional changes.¹⁶

Western states appear to have urged political liberalisation not necessarily because they feel this will be good for Africans, but because they believe it is in their own interests to do so. When some governments were reluctant to oppose the *apartheid* régime in South Africa and helped African dictators to oppress their citizens, it was because they had concluded it was in their strategic interests to do so. The encouragement of political change is an about-face designed to facilitate a measure of Western disengagement from Africa.¹⁷ It is not, therefore, surprising that the push for multi-party politics in Africa, which was accompanied by the indifference of Western powers to the

¹⁵ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey, 1979* (London, 1980), p. 1.

¹⁶ David Held, 'Democracy: past, present, and possible futures', in *Alternatives: social transformation and human governance* (Boulder, CO), 18, 3, 1993, pp. 259-71.

¹⁷ See, for instance, *Africa Confidential*, 33, 10 January 1992, p. 2.

continent's economic plight, started only after the end of the cold war. As explained in Washington, DC, since the US Government believes it was 'the triumph of democracy and markets' that defeated communism, it is committed to the defence of both.¹⁸

The drive for political liberalisation came in the wake of similar efforts by the World Bank and the IMF to promote structural change. The ensuing economic reforms were sparked by the growing debt crises in developing countries, and by the fear that any attempt to default could have a negative impact on the international financial system. Economic and political reforms have symbolised efforts by African régimes to do something to improve their own conditions, and the West has occasionally withheld assistance to states in which these measures have not been implemented as agreed.

Some Western governments have threatened economic sanctions against African régimes which fail to respect human rights, and especially the liberties enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Moreover, Article 21(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is also based on Western values, states:

The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.¹⁹

The link between liberal democracy and rights was highlighted in June 1993 by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, where the UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and Western leaders emphasised the concept of the universality of rights. However, many African régimes, supported by other developing countries and China, were opposed to this concept, which some described as a conspiracy by the West to impose its values on other societies.²⁰ They regarded the standardisation of rights as a pretext through which the West sought to force African states to change their political and economic systems.

African political leaders, some of whom have little or no respect for 'rights', have argued that without food, development, shelter, and clothing, human dignity would be undermined. For example, the Kenyan Foreign Minister told the Vienna Conference that there was

¹⁸ Talbott, loc. cit. pp. 8–9.

¹⁹ Ian Brownlie (ed.), *Basic Documents on Human Rights* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 21–7.

²⁰ Cf. Julius O. Ihonvbere, 'The State, Human Rights and Democratization in Africa', in *Current World Leaders* (Santa Barbara, CA), 37, 4, August 1994, pp. 59–80.

an 'inescapable' connection between development and human rights, and questioned the championing of 'rights such as the freedom of the press and free speech to a humanity deprived of food, education and other basic needs'.²¹ African leaders have also opposed the tying of foreign aid to political liberalisation. While there is some truth in the argument that withholding external assistance in the absence of reforms often delays development and causes suffering to many people, the recent history of Africa shows that without public accountability, aid has been frequently misused by influential élites and has not benefited the poor.

To the extent that political accountability can help reduce corruption and strengthen public institutions, it can lead to the amelioration of some economic problems. It was partly for this reason that the Vienna Declaration stressed the 'mutually reinforcing interrelationship between development, democracy and human rights'.²² Article 5 states that 'human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated', but also recognises the essence of cultural relativism when it notes 'the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds'.²³ However, Western governments, as well as the World Bank and the IMF, although very keen to see political and civil liberties respected, have not shown the same level of concern for the rights enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. One conjecture is that a focus on these would call for more external engagement, especially by providing extra economic assistance, at a time when the West is seeking to distance itself from Africa. Accordingly, a number of leaders have played down the significance of economic justice and urged African régimes to take economic and political measures which have effectively abolished free medical services and primary schools for the poor. Yet it is clear that without an educated and well-informed population, it is hard to sustain responsible and accountable governments which so many seek to promote.

What does the West hope to gain from the political and economic reforms that have been urged on many states? A former US government official, Carol Lancaster, has argued that 'the demands for democracy in Africa...have been less a reflection of the recognition of the superiority of open political systems than a protest against the economic

²¹ *The Weekly Review* (Nairobi), 25 June 1993, p. 11.

²² UN General Assembly, 'Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action', New York, 1993, p. 25.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 5.

failures of authoritarian regimes'.²⁴ Although some analysts seem to believe that democratic states cannot experience famine,²⁵ there would appear to be several other motives behind the West's promotion of liberal democracy, notably debt repayment, the need to reduce economic assistance, the fear of refugees, and the desire to keep Africa at arms length. Obviously some Western governments and international financial institutions believe that if structural reforms are implemented, especially those that encourage exports, African states can improve their chances of raising funds to pay at least part of the interest on their loans. In such a case, it would be to the economic advantage of the West for African states to undertake the reforms.

The decision by the United States, Britain, and Germany to lean heavily on the Kenyan Government during 1991 may have had more to do with what these countries believed they would gain than an altruistic concern for the oppressed inhabitants. It was only after aid donors and the World Bank had made further assistance contingent on substantive political and economic reforms that President Moi agreed to a multi-party system. However, Kenya's public institutions are still fragile, while the judiciary, the armed forces, the civil service, and the media are not fully developed. Because of this, both government and opposition leaders have used bribery, intimidation, and other corrupt methods to try to win or maintain power. While the December 1992 elections were vigorously contested – and Kenya's new Parliament is a strong counterweight to the Government – ethnic clashes, a few of which had been officially sanctioned, increased thereafter. Political pluralism has been exploited by some Kenyans to whip up ethnic emotions and divide the society.

In Rwanda it was also partly through external pressures, especially from Belgium and France, that President Habyarimana agreed to end the one-party state in June 1991. The new constitution opened the way for the ruling MRND to be challenged by several opposition parties, including the Democratic Republican Movement, the Social Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Party, and the Liberal Party. Some of Habyarimana's cohorts were so strongly opposed to the competitive political system that they tried to sabotage every effort to make it work – indeed, they were allegedly responsible for the death of the President by arranging for his aircraft to crash in March 1994.

²⁴ Carol Lancaster, 'Democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa', in *Survival* (London), 35, 3, 1993, p. 48.

²⁵ For example, Talbott, loc. cit. p. 8, has cited Amartya Sen of Harvard University on this issue.

Although this is not the place to assess the origins and implications of the ensuing genocide that engulfed Rwanda,²⁶ there can be no doubt that multi-party democracy is even less likely to be a success in the near future.

In the case of Angola, it was the Soviet Union, the United States, and Portugal that persuaded Unita and the MPLA to reach the settlement in May 1991 that led to elections in September 1992. The MPLA won the majority of seats in the National Assembly, while its leader, dos Santos, obtained 49.57 per cent of the presidential vote, as against 40.07 per cent for Savimbi. But although international observers said the elections had been free and fair, Unita claimed there had been widespread fraud and refused to accept that its defeat had not been rigged. In Angola, as in Kenya and Rwanda, liberal democracy is far from becoming a reality.

OBSTACLES TO DEMOCRATISATION

The major impediments to multi-party democracy in Africa include the inappropriateness of certain Western ideas and practices, the inexperience of leaders in running multi-party systems, and the general political, economic, and social conditions. As claimed in 1994:

One of the abiding problems of political evolution in Africa ... [is] the belief on the part of both the winners and the losers of elections or political competition that the winner would take everything leaving the loser with no political role, no right to question and criticise and no security from harassment or worse.²⁷

While this 'winner takes all' mentality stems from the fact that those who control the machinery of government and administration very often have unlimited access to the resources of the state, it also demonstrates the failure, on the part of both political leaders and the public, to understand the essence of a multi-party system.

While the goal of most Western governments has been to inculcate their own ideas about the responsible use of political power, many policy-makers, commentators, and scholars appear unable to make clear distinctions between the principles and practices of democracy. One major flaw in their strategy is that this all-important concept has not been disaggregated from its specific Western practices. Because there is no tradition of Western-type democracy in Africa, it will take time to establish institutions on which it thrives. The efficacy of multi-

²⁶ See Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis, 1959-1994: history of a genocide* (London, 1995).

²⁷ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey, 1993-1994* (London, 1995), p. 202.

party politics in any society which understands the concept of liberal or neo-liberal democracy cannot be doubted, but the system of governance being advocated does not correspond to the African political landscape.

Another problem is that democratic expectations have been – or, at least, were initially – too high. The fact that African states have succumbed to pressures and allowed competing organisations to contest elections has given the misleading impression that their establishment is proof of a genuine desire to embrace liberal democracy. In reality, political liberalisation has been taking place in Africa without such a commitment, and if policy-makers in the West have not noticed the problem, it is because they have not clearly distinguished *form* from *content*. As Somerville has observed: ‘Leading Western decision-makers pinned more hope than was justified on the opportunities for the resurgence of democracy in African states and on the positive effect of international developments on the root causes of African conflicts’.²⁸

There is growing evidence that some Western-promoted reforms have had a harmful impact on political stability and multi-party democracy. The structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) required by the IMF and the World Bank have led to faster economic growth in some African states. The two institutions have demanded smaller bureaucracies, reductions in government expenditures, removal of food subsidies, encouragement of exports, and an emphasis on the private sector. Although it is possible that these measures may lead to more wealth in the longer term, they are causing enormous social and economic pains. As a result, the majority of the people are more interested in finding out how to cope with daily hardships than in ensuring that their governments are accountable. The emphasis on exports has encouraged farmers to concentrate on cash crops, but this has led to food shortages in some countries. Moreover, the privatisation of public assets has resulted in the appropriation of the society’s wealth by the élite of dominant ethnic groups. Politically, this is potentially destabilising and can undermine the socio-economic conditions under which multi-party democracy generally flourishes.

The reduction in state bureaucracies and expenditures has resulted in very high levels of unemployment, and since African countries do not provide social security benefits, many who have no jobs are desperate enough to undertake almost any task. In Rwanda, for example, the *Interhamwe* – i.e. ‘those with a common cause’ – were willing to kill any

²⁸ Keith Somerville, ‘The Failure of Democratic Reform in Angola and Zaire’, in *Survival*, 35, 3, 1993, p. 52.

opponent of MRND rule, regardless of ethnic origin, having been recruited in 1994 by Habyarimana's presidential guard. The Western press has often referred to these militias as ultra-Hutu nationalists, but that is not the case. In Kenya, similar gangs have been organised and paid to set ethnic groups against each other with a view to undermining the multi-party system. In both countries, the austerity measures suggested/imposed by the IMF and the World Bank have contributed to the emergence of a growing number of desperate youths.

The much criticised SAPs have put a premium on the operation of 'market forces' at a time when domestic political imperatives often demand increased state intervention. Most African states could not find ways of resuscitating their economies without external assistance, and Western governments and investors would not commit their resources unless they saw a readiness for most sectors to be liberalised. These conditions have compelled African leaders to increasingly walk a tightrope between the need to redress internal inequalities and imbalances in order to resolve socio-economic and political conflicts, and the imperative to privatise in the hope of attracting foreign aid and investment for long-term development.

Other obstacles to political stability have included mediocre macro-economic planning and project selection, inadequate resources, and a lack of skilled personnel that is both a cause and a result of misguided policies. Poor conditions have compelled many African professionals to find a better life elsewhere, thereby depriving their countries of the human resources required to formulate and implement the most appropriate strategies. The brain drain from Africa has been so enormous that in mid-1993, the World Bank Vice-President for Africa, Edward Jaycox, complained that \$14,000 million in loans had not been disbursed because of a lack of the human and institutional capacity to draw the funds and implement the projects for which the money was intended.²⁹

It is generally acknowledged that in Africa, as elsewhere, sound economies are the bedrock of political stability, without which liberal democracy may falter. Voters often expect their newly-elected leaders to remove existing class and regional disparities by extending social and economic benefits to previously disadvantaged groups. This would certainly reinforce the legitimacy and authority of any new government. However, the redirection of resources into particular sectors or regions requires a high level of state intervention. In terms of political

²⁹ *The Weekly Review*, 25 June 1993, p. 27.

stability, such efforts are necessary to resolve some internal conflicts, especially those based on the perception of economic marginalisation on the part of certain groups, but they often run counter to measures designed to promote the 'market forces' urged by the World Bank, the IMF, and Western donors. Unless severe economic difficulties are resolved and efforts made to pursue balanced development which takes into account the social effects of SAPs, some African states have only a slim chance of achieving political stability and sustaining multi-party democracy.

Additional obstacles are associated with the inability or unwillingness of African leaders to abide by 'the rules of the game', and by the failure of opposition parties to understand that they can play a constructive rôle when not in power. Moreover, while the existence of several ethnic groups in a state does not by itself constitute a problem, some politicians have sought to capitalise on their fears and ignorance. Because of this, efforts to introduce liberal democracy have tended to exacerbate rather than reduce ethnic tensions, not least in order to further the careers of some individuals. For example, although Ford had become the main opposition party in Kenya by 1990, it split as elections approached in 1992, with Kenneth Matiba leading a predominantly Kikuyu Ford-Asili, while Oginga Odinga was promoting a mainly Luo Ford-Kenya. To make matters worse, the latter had become divided by 1996 into a multi-ethnic faction led by Kijana Wamalwa, a Luya, and a Luo faction led by Rila Odinga, son of the late Oginga Odinga. In Angola, politicians exploited the civil war to enhance fear and hostility between the Ovimbundu (38 per cent of the population), who are loyal to Unita, and other ethnic groups who supported the MPLA.

Competition for political power in Africa has assumed this dimension largely because there are few effective grassroots organisations for articulating the wishes of ordinary people as regards what type of government they desire, and how they can influence policy. Unless the question of politicians exploiting primordial ties is addressed, the future of multi-partyism in Africa will remain uncertain. Indeed, as suggested by René Lemarchand, 'the movement towards democracy may contain within itself the seeds of its own undoing'.³⁰

The introduction of any new political system with its associated norms and values is almost bound to generate resistance. This has been

³⁰ René Lemarchand, 'Africa's Troubled Transitions', in *Journal of Democracy* (Baltimore), 3, 4, 1992, p. 98.

the case with the move towards political pluralism in some parts of Africa. Those in power have tried to resist reforms, and where changes have taken place, few politicians have been able to cope with their unfamiliar responsibilities. For instance, President Moi has found it hard in Kenya to implement some of the most expected political and economic reforms, and even after introducing multi-party politics, he continued to deny the opposition access to the government media, and especially the radio. As for the tragic setbacks experienced in Rwanda, they resulted partly (if not mainly) from the reluctance of President Habyarimana and his supporters to accept power-sharing with opposition parties. Similarly, in Angola, the leaders of Unita and the MPLA appear to have been mesmerised by fears and expectations that whoever won the long-awaited elections would use the machinery of government to crush their opponents despite the creation of a multi-party process.

The above factors help to explain why efforts to establish liberal democracy have met with little success in much of Africa. The results of the September 1992 elections in Angola were rejected by Unita, and Savimbi did not agree to co-operate with the MPLA régime until 1995. The attempt to create a transition government in Rwanda ended in tragic circumstances in March 1994, since when the quasi-military FPR-led régime has not been ready to try and resuscitate the process of democratisation.³¹ In Kenya, where elections have been conducted periodically, they have more often than not been rigged, thereby resulting in the same leaders holding office for decades. Indeed, until December 1992, they merely provided opportunities for politicians to demonstrate their loyalty to the President. In that sense, elections became what have been described as 'five-yearly exercises in the popular affirmation of the power of the existing government'.³² Certainly, Moi was by 1996 reasserting his dictatorial rule once again.³³

Despite the rhetoric, the principles of popular sovereignty and public accountability continue to be ignored in much of Africa. The fact is that these fundamental postulates of political legitimacy are being constrained by undeveloped and fragile public institutions, and by leaders determined to disregard popular demands.

³¹ See Samuel M. Makinda, 'Revisiting Rwanda: reconciliation postponed', in *The World Today*, 52, 5 May 1996, pp. 125-8.

³² *Strategic Survey, 1993-1994*, p. 206.

³³ Gilbert M. Khadiagala, 'Kenya: intractable authoritarianism', in *SAIS Review* (Washington, DC), 15, Summer/Fall 1995, pp. 53-73.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Attempts to establish multi-party systems and liberal democracy in the early 1990s have succeeded only partially, due to a variety of domestic and external factors. The post-cold war environment not only pushed most African states further to the outer periphery of the international system, but also offered an opportunity for the erosion of their national sovereignty through outside intervention in domestic matters. This has enabled individuals in a number of countries to reassert their own personal freedoms, and to regain their ability to organise opposition parties. However, despite this enhancement of popular sovereignty, some régimes in the continent are beginning to reverse the political changes made earlier, and prospects for democracy are still uncertain to say the least.

Some Western donors appeared to recognise the limits of their impact on African politics, while others were not willing to exert pressures as long as the respective régimes agreed to a semblance of democratic rule. It has also become clear that the introduction of market-based reforms and austerity measures has caused great social pains and growing disaffection with those in power. Reductions in public expenditures have deprived the poor of education and health services and led to more unemployment – problems that can be politically destabilising. The removal of food subsidies may have given producers incentives, but has also led to increased cases of malnutrition. The emphasis on exports has enabled some African countries to pay more interest on their debts, but has also meant less food being grown locally and greater reliance on food imports. African political leaders who have introduced SAPs may have earned the respect of the international financial institutions, but they have often incurred the wrath of their own people and been unable to create conditions which are conducive to stable democratic rule.

If not properly addressed, problems caused by structural adjustment will engender political uncertainty and aggravate the continuing problems of security. Moreover, if the West is so keen to see political liberalisation translated into sustained multi-party democracy, then it needs to help build and/or improve the institutional capacity so critical to development. While it may be useful to link some types of foreign assistance to political and economic liberalisation, aid programmes need to promote social justice in the widest sense. Their implementation may strengthen civil society, but African communities will benefit only if their leaders abide by the aforementioned ‘rules of the game’ that

enable multi-party democracy to become effective. Moreover, if newly introduced measures indirectly undermine efforts to achieve balanced and sustainable development, they may shake the very foundations on which human dignity rests.

Efforts by external governments, institutions, and agencies to direct political and economic changes must not deny the peoples of Africa and their representatives the right to determine their own future. It has been argued that global interdependence has profoundly affected the process of governance, and especially the concepts of consent and legitimacy.³⁴ They have broadened the constituency of Western policy-makers, which has become the entire world, and have altered both the meaning of accountability and the scope of political participation. It needs to be recognised that those changes have been far more deeply felt in Africa than elsewhere because so many important decisions that affect every state have been formulated in Europe and North America. It can be concluded that attempts to introduce liberal democracy have made it possible for the West to stand aloof from Africa while influencing its political and economic future.

³⁴ David Held, 'Democracy, the Nation-State and the Global System', in *Economy and Society* (London), 20, 2, 1991, p. 143.