Western Democracy in Africa as a Failed Project: Which Way Forward?

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Abstract

The role of democracy in societal transformation and nation-building in Sub-Saharan Africa has been compromised by political and social strictures created during more than three decades of autocratic rule of most countries that still underline the practical and moral workings of the state today. Western democracy remains mired in rigging cleavages that find expression in parochial tendencies ranging from divide and rule to ethnicism and to regionalism being orchestrated by the state's political elites and those loyal to the ruling regime in a neo-patrimonial manner. As a result, the ability to mobilise all and sundry towards a meaningful democratic culture and development is limited. In this context good governance has remained, for the vast majority of Africans, illusory. With the end of the Cold War which characterised world politics since 1945, the United States of America and Europe have descended on the continent and re-launched a crusade for democracy without paying any attention to the structures which could harness meaningful democratic culture and development. This essay focuses on the dynamics that have impeded the development of western democracy in Africa. It interrogates even the *raison d'etre* of such a western buzzword with regard to meaningful development in most African countries. Does Africa really need western democracy to cure her developmental malady? This essay, while working on the argument that western democracy has botched woefully in most parts of the continent, attempts to proffer some suggestions, which if implemented would launch most African countries towards meaningful democratic culture.

Introduction: General Observation and Objectives

The fact that world politics between 1945 and 1989 was dominated and monopolized by two world powers–the United States of America and the Union of Social Socialist Republics–cannot be denied. That domination experienced a sharp twist in 1990 when the Cold War came to an end with the reunification of the two German nations. The

end of the Cold War led to what has been termed in certain quarters as the "third wave of democratic struggle in Africa" (Guseh and Oritsejafor, 2005:122). As a matter of fact, Africa has gone through three rounds of democratic struggle. The first round apparently began when indigenous Africans began their struggle for independence from European colonial rule in the 1960s, although it was only later in the 1970s and the late 1980s when Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South West Africa secured independence through armed struggles (IIiffe, 1995). Unfortunately, when the elites of these countries gained independence, they followed the same policies of exploitation and repression which the European powers had practiced. This led to the second wave of democratisation."Sadly the second wave was short-lived and began to lose vapour by the mid 1970s. This was precipitated by the violent response of various authoritarian regimes to this struggle for democracy, such as harassment, arrest, imprisonment, assassination and banishment into exile, and economic strangulation for pro-democracy activists and their supporters" (Guseh and Oritsejafor, 2005: 121).

The ascendancy of America as the sole superpower in world politics after 1990 was symptomatic of a crusade launched by Western powers to impose western democracy on Africa south of the Sahara. America and some of her European surrogates tied good governance and/or democracy to economic aid (Ake, 2000: 206). This meant that for authoritarian and kleptocratic African governments to receive any economic aid from the US and its allies, they were required to liberalise their economies and thus democratise their politics according to western-style democracy. That was just one of the factors that led to the third wave of democracy in Africa. Aid donor institutions which, of course, were American in origin like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) or World Bank also promised withholding aid if African countries failed to democratise their regimes. The overthrow of President Bourgiba of Tunisia as well as the introduction of multi-party politics in Algeria after the 1988 riots; the freeing of Nelson Mandela in South Africa and the Franco-African Summit at La Baule in June 1990, all combined individually and collectively to have ramifications for Sub-Saharan Africa (Bayart, 2009:xx). Consequently, democracy came like a bitter pill that most authoritarian African heads of state had to swallow.

The whirlwind of democracy has attracted the attention of many scholars who have examined it in various ways (Bayart et. al. 1999; Bayart 2009; Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Mafeje, 1995; Ngoh, 2001; Schneider, 2004; Akinyele, 2004; Osaghae, 2001; Agbese 2001; Klopp, 2001; Mamdani, 1996; Brown, 2001; Aiyede 2003; Fareed, 1997; Guseh and Oritsejafor 2005; Mulikita, 2003; Breytenbach, 1996; Baylies, 1995; Harrison 1996; Allen, 1995; Sklar, 1991; Wagnaraja, 1993; Akinde, 1995; Diamond, 1988, Ndegwa, 2001). These scholars, have carried out piercing and penetrating work on western democracy in Africa. Their works illustrate the volume of attention that has been devoted by scholars to the epoch of democracy in Africa. Yet this does not by any means imply that all have been exhausted on the topic. Although these authors have carried out excellent research on the democratic processes in various parts of Africa, and although they deserve a pat on their intellectual backs, they have not, in the opinion of this author,

charted a path forward which, if followed, could bring meaningful democracy to some parts of Africa and enhance their development.

The optimism and ecstasy which overcame Africa in this era of renewed democracy was soon eclipsed as the political ecology of Africa proved too resistant for genuine western democracy to settle, germinate and grow there; this was, of course, the case in some parts of Africa. In Benin it was welcomed but a few years later the country relapsed into the dictatorial system. This paper aims at unraveling some of the causes which were at the forefront in most African countries south of the Sahara behind impeding democracy and which seemingly indicated that they would truly allow the continent to move towards meaningful development. One cause for sure is that most of the continent still lies under the datum line of poverty. HIV/AIDS has further slowed the growth rate in the continent; the unemployment rate is almost reaching astronomical figures; corruption and anxiety of leaders to stay in power till eternity has shown that western democracy is a far-fetched dream. With all these handicaps what should be done? In other words, what is the way forward?

Theoretical Framework

There is no single theory which can best describe democracy. Only a combination of theories could best describe the concept (Dahl, 1965:1). This is as complicated as the definition of democracy itself. As a political concept democracy at certain quarters means popular power and what is implied in the famous Lincolnian formulation, "government of the people, for the people, by the people" (Ake, 2000:7).This formulation has been widely accepted across the world as the ideal operational definition of democracy. Huntington (1993: 366) warns us of problems ensuring from the ambiguity that results when democracy is defined in terms of source of authority or in terms of purposes, as classical theorists tend to do. According to him, the key procedure of democracy is that in it the leaders are selected by people they govern through means of competitive elections.

However, the modern theoretical standpoint in defining democracy appears to have originated as far back as the eighteenth century with the inception of what later became known as the classical theory. The French Enlightenment philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau based his ideas about the subject on the "Social Contract" which creates an indivisible body that we are all part of. "Under the supreme direction of the general will" we all invest our powers and surrender our persons to this body (Sabine, 1961). He suggests that all decisions made by such an entity undoubtedly interested in self well-being shall be good ones. Rousseau therefore stresses the importance of the source of authority and the purpose of this collective body; its universal inclusiveness and its aim for the common good. However, Rousseau's political philosophy is so vague that it can hardly be said to point to any specific direction (Sabine, 1961: 593-596).

Joseph Schumpeter did not mince words when he refuted this theory propounded by Rousseau, centered as it is on the "will of the people" and the "common good" as guiding principles. He dismissed all these as utopian. Schumpeter offers a rather procedural

definition by which the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by competing for the peoples' votes (Schumpeter, 2003: 5-11).The above theories with their shortcomings cannot be applied to the African continent because democracy is not homogeneous in the continent.

However, Robert Dahl's theory appears to be more helpful for our purpose because of the variety of democracies and the different contexts in which democracy operates on the continent. Dahl delivers a new concept of "polyarchy". Here he is not dealing exclusively with classification of regimes. According to him, "polyarchy" could also be applied to assess various typologies of social associations which includes amongst others, churches, company boards and even football clubs. Dahl further opines that one of the most common traps when discussing democracy at any level is failing to acknowledge the difference between the perfect, nonexistent and ideal form of democracy on the one side and the reality imposed by frames, limitations and constraints of actual circumstances on the other, a situation which describes some parts of Africa. He goes on to describe "the Ideal" and "the Actual" and suggests five criteria that a system should fulfill in order to be seen as democratic. These are: effective participation; voting equality; enlightened understanding; control of the agenda and inclusion of adults (Dahl, 1971: 26-29). He emphasizes that these, while belonging to the realm of "the Ideal", can and should serve as a standard towards which "the Actual" should strive and against which it should be compared.

Dahl takes stock of modern states and names six institutions that should exist in a country in order for it to be seen as a democracy. According to him, a large-scale democracy must have the following features: elected officials; 'free, fair and frequent elections'; freedom of expression; alternative sources of information; associational autonomy; and inclusive citizenship. Dahl's work represents a synthesis of procedural, deliberative and substantive approaches in contemporary political discourse concerning democracy. It thus becomes imperative for us to see why the features of Dahl's Ideal and Actual does not work in most parts of Africa. The next section will examine some of these dynamics which have impeded the workings of democracy in some parts of Africa.

The Twilight of Democracy: Some Dynamics of Failure

The exhilaration and rapture that was associated with the re-introduction of multi-party politics in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s was soon to fizzle out. The reasons for such dissipation are quite complex. But they could still be appreciated under certain rubrics that could be applied to most African countries. This section attempts to critically examine these rubrics.

'Sit-Tightism' Systems

One such rubric is what I prefer to call here as 'sit-tight' governments and presidents. This refers to incumbents not willing to give up the prestige, power and opulence that goes with the presidency. They have become despotic and authoritarian in nature. Fareed (1997:29) maintains that the illiberal character of such presidents in the dispensation of

new democracies has become a source of worry for many but is suggestive of the fact that the celebration of the triumph of democracy is still a bit hasty. Whatever way we take it, the fact is that Fareed is not far from reality as many governments–elected or not–prefer to move away from the rules of the democratic game and assert themselves continuously when in power.

The strongest arms of such governments which give them credibility find expression in "the consolidation of single parties, president-for-life, extensive security establishments, widespread inequalities, the army and personal rule" (Aiyede 2003:2). Thus the majority of people are denied the opportunity to meaningfully participate in decision-making. Above all, governance has been reduced to the practical expression of the whims and caprices of dictators and their sects (Aiyede 2003). Consequently, the democratic struggles of the 1990s which heralded the end of authoritarianism seemingly has ended up in new forms of authoritarianism. No wonder that some heads of states even argue that the one-party state serve the purpose of overcoming ethnic and other divisions and achieving greater cohesion of the state. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania actually argued that democracy is stronger in a one-party state as that party represents the whole nation while multiple parties can encompass only small portions of society. This type of argument has little support when it comes to practice. He was, however, talking about democratic socialism when he launched his *Ujaama,* the Kiswahili word which means "brotherhood" (Gordon & Gordon, 2007:171).

Ethnicity, Elites and the Mirage of Democracy

Nowhere in the continent has democracy been more elusive than within the brackets of ethnicity propagated by political elites. This appears to be one of the greatest challenges for the western model of democracy in most parts of the continent. Western democratic governance as well as concrete political institutions have not taken a nationalistic turn in their formation, and orientation because most of the time the problems of regionalism rear their ugly heads (Osaghae, 2001; Agbese, 2001).

A good example could be drawn from the East African country, Kenya. It is said that a majority of Kenyan political elites fan ethnic clashes amongst rural people. This is done to maintain themselves in the corridors of power (Klopp, 2001: 475). Closely related to this is the patronage, clientele system, policy of divide and rule, neo-patrimonialism, the politics of the belly, prebendalism, and so on, which again hampers the advancement of the western type of democracy in the continent. These features have also been well–illustrated in Cameroonian history. In the 1990s Cameroon society, from the height of the state's level downward, appeared to be peopled exclusively by a multitude of private individuals chosen for their loyalty to the state rather than merit. The Beti ethnic group from which the President came occupied almost all the important positions in government. These people embezzled state resources without a 'modicum of morality' (Bayart 2009; Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1997; Nyamnjoh 1999; Ndembiyembe 1997; Wiredu 1998).

In Kenya, key power brokers and patronage bosses concentrated around the veteran politician, Danial Arap Moi, mostly his KANU members of parliament and ministers were

actively countering advocates of multi-party politics. In early 1991, rallies were held in rural areas to decry multi-party politics (Klopp 2001). To completely eclipse the democratic process the incumbent governments fragmented the opposition parties into "groups willing to accept different rules of competition" (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1991:71)

Money or Trading Democracy

Any causal observation indicates that "money" democracy is a new form of democracy which is again best illustrated by the Cameroon example. Democracy in the Cameroonian context has some peculiarities worth examining and is dubbed at times as 'trading or money democracy'. Within seventy-two hours of the announcement of the elections date in 2011, more than fifty party leaders filed in their candidature to run the race for the presidency 2011 elections. The reason for such a number could simply be found in the fact that people had to pay CFA 5,000,000 (about $12,000USD). Once their applications went through the administrative procedures they were in turn given CFA 25,000,000 (about $60,000 USD)

The implication of this situation is obvious but needs further explanation. It befogs anyone's imagination how the government which is at the same time the ruling party and the incumbent will financially sponsor opposition parties to campaign against it. The argument is that it could only be easy and certain if the incumbent knew that it has done everything possible for the opposition never to win. It would have never been the other way round. This type of democracy may appear to be quite new but it is something which Bayart had foreseen a long time ago (Bayart, 2009). In a country like Cameroon the opposition feels that its political enemy should sponsor them to campaign against itself. This appears to be one of the greatest blunders of the opposition. In countries like Senegal presidential candidates instead deposit WFCA 25,000,000($60,000USD). That shows some level of seriousness. But in Cameroon the case is different. This partly explains why the country has one of the longest serving governments in the continent.

The Military Intervention Virus

In some countries the allure of the military to always intervene has not produced the best results for democracy. Contemporary debates on western democracy are pegged on the viability of democratic transformation, the role of external forces and the role of civil society (Allen, 1995: 148). Yet that dream of transformation has been constantly punctuated by the military. No case in Sub-Saharan Africa seems to better explain this notion than that of Nigeria. The emergence of new western democracies saw a bid on the part of existing military government to hang onto power. In the early 1990s, in order to insure national cohesion the military in Nigeria sponsored constitution-making and attempted to formulate a highly complicated model of governance. This included, amongst other things, a formula in which the successful candidate had to capture 25 percent of votes in each of at least two-thirds of the states in the country. In addition, all states of the federal republic had to be represented in the new president's cabinet of ministers. When it became apparent that Bashuron M.K.O. Abiola was winning the 1993 elections on the platform of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the military head of state, General Ibrahim Babagida annulled the elections. The reason for the

annulment was simply that Bashuron Mr. Abiola was not in the "good books" of the military elite. (Akiyele, 2004:66).

The Meaning of Democracy to the Rural/Urban Majority

It is difficult, if not impossible, for democracy to settle down in Africa when the population is not even clear about what it means. When Graham Harrison conducted a research in Mozambique on the significance of Multi-Party elections his results were quite revealing. During interviews with peasants, mostly in the villages of Munda and Mecufi, two questions were posed in order to illicit opinions: "what difference had democracy made to your life/ life in the village and what was the meaning or significance of the elections for you?" (Harrison, 1996:25). The principal response to the question concerning the concrete impact of democracy showed that prevalent problems had not been handled through democracy. In other words, there was still prevalent hike in prices, poverty, lack of employment, poor harvests and little or no social provisions. This showed that democracy had failed to solve basic problems and provide the necessities that common people need, although according to Harrison (1996:26) "many others realized that things had not changed at all". It was clear that all and sundry had not enjoyed the benefits that were to come with western democracy as anticipated by civil society.

Election Rigging

The rigging of elections and other forms of democratic misconduct have prevented democracy from succeeding in most African countries. In countries like Cameroon, rigging has become the norm of the incumbent for more than a decade. The consequence of such a practice is that it increases voting apathy amongst the masses. If democracy, as Diamond has noted, (1988:4), and as corroborated by Schumpeter (1976), involves a substantial level of individual and again collective competition for public office among citizens, and the existence of a regular schedule of elections from which no citizen of legal voting age is excluded, then the rigging of elections has made it very difficult for genuine western democracy to exist in Africa.

In the same vein the approval of many political parties and the fragmentation of civil society have gone a long way to 'destroy' the western model of democracy in Africa. In the 2011 elections in Cameroon more than 125 parties participated (Nkwi, 2011). These parties had no joint or combined objectives and through the leaders the incumbent government divided them; hence, they were not able to galvanise any support from all and sundry. All the above reasons show why western democracy has failed in most countries in the African continent. It is therefore imperative to chart a way forward. The next section attempts to show such a way. What is striking is that almost all the above elements appear to be themselves benefitting the various sub-Saharan African regimes; yet for any meaningful democratic reforms to take place it is relevant to identify such issues before attempting a way forward without them.

Which Way Forward?

The above discussions have examined the various reasons and dynamics why western style democracy has not been able to operate meaningfully in most African countries south of the Sahara. But we must also note that some countries have actually experienced meaningful democracy. They include Benin, one of the countries to experience democracy meaningfully through the holding of a national conference (Akinde, 1995: 268) and in Tanzania where in 2001 the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi led by President Benjamin Mkapa won the democratic elections and empowered women in all fronts (Brown, 2001:67-68). Of course Ghana is another very good example but only after Jerry Rawlings had left the stage there. Sometime ago Claude Ake published his book, *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa* in which he questions whether democracy is feasible in Africa (Ake, 2000). The problem is not whether it is possible for democracy to progress in Africa but rather whether within the circumstances in which African states find themselves, democracy can be possible. It therefore makes good sense to proffer a way forward which, if a majority of African countries were to follow, might give western style democracy a chance succeed. Of course there are challenges and difficulties that this proffered solutions will also face. The first challenge and difficulty is that what can happen in a part of Africa may not be replicated across the continent. The heterogeneous nature of the continent would not make this possible.

Does Africa Need Western Democracy at all?

Since 1990 western democracy has become a buzzword and become synonymous with development. Yet the last two decades have shown that democratic transition in Africa need to be re-questioned and reformulated towards an auto-centric paradigm. Democracy should lead to meaningful development that will affect all and sundry or else it will not be relevant. I, howevers take inspiration from Sklar and Whitaker (1991) who have convincingly argued that meaningful democracy should be linked to development. They have emphasised that democracy is not simply about forms or means but also about ends which have to do with its inherent capacity to enhance development. Most if not all societies will have to undergo 'developmental democracy' which is more oriented to solving "problems of economic underdevelopment, social stagnation and political drift" (Sklar & Whitman, 1991). It will therefore be imperative to see democracy and development as two bedfellows who are complements of each other. Such complementarities if well harnessed will definitely lead to meaningful development. Wagnaraja (1993) did not mince words when she said: "democracy and development are two sides of the same coin". Countries by any standard African need development and if democracy cannot match with this then it is irrelevant.

The failure to link democracy to development indicates that some African societies should go back to the African democracy which tends to be an auto-centric style of democracy. The fact that African democracy exists has raised debates of unusual proportions. July (1992) and Lyold (1967), rightly argue that democracy is no stranger to Africa given that traditional Africans communities had regulatory institutions that limited the powers of their kings which had to be consulted by him in many major decisions.

Therefore, the king ruled with the consent of their nobles in the interest of the subjects. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1970:12) put the case of African type of democracy in stronger terms. They said:

> …the government of an African state consists in a balance between power and authority on the one side and obligation and responsibility on the other….The distribution of political authority provides a machinery by which the various agents of government can be held to their responsibilities…and kings and chiefs ruled by consent….A ruler's subjects are as fully aware of the duties he owes them as they are of the duties they owe to him, and are able to exert pressure to make him discharge these duties

Thus more checks and balances existed in African pre-colonial societies than what is exists in the 21st century in the name of western democracy. Despite such institutions, Bratton and van de Walle have attempted to dismiss African democracy by declaring that some of these societies prevented women, slaves, strangers and younger people from participating in decision-making processes and that it is questionable if any pre-colonial traditional African society had experienced direct democracy. The issue at stake, then, is whether African democracy, if blended with certain elements of western-styled democracy, can lead some African countries towards development.

Whatever the argument against African democracy, it is easy for us to see the concept of western democracy as something which for two decades has not achieved anything meaningful for some African countries.

The need for a strong civil society

If anything necessitated the re-introduction of multi-party politics in Africa it was the vibrant civil society that existed in most African countries in the 1990s. Civil society, it must be stressed, deals with day-to-day operations of livelihood and one should be able to talk of civil society when it has an impact on society; if not it should be left out (Nkwi, 2006:93). The subject of civil society has thrown up endless disputes over definitions but its study in Africa has made great strides in academia since the 1990s (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Kasfir 1998; Sitoe 1998; Osaghae 1994).

The vibrancy of civil society in the 1990s soon waned. It became increasingly difficult to evolve a viable, inclusive and participatory governance structure due to the authoritarian nature of most African countries. That difficulty was compounded and complicated by the states' use of political stratagems such as divide-and-rule, prebendalism, patronage and clientelism, all of which has led to the 'informalisation' of politics. Through these methods the ruling government has penetrated civil society and survived by 'buying off' sections of it (Nkwi, 2006: 99). This has led to the impotency of civil society.

The way out of this gloomy situation requires civil society to transcend narrow, social and political boundaries and identify with the daily and legitimate struggles of

ordinary citizens. Francis B. Nyamnjoh (1999) argues that attempts to empower civil society have met with little success because of poor organisation, while Yenshu (2001) blames weak social mobilisation in a context of repressive laws that stifle real political and social debates. To overcome these problems civil society in Africa must therefore develop itself through a national network capable of promoting a more consistent and coherent democratic discourse and promoting practices and attitudes that defend the fundamental rights of citizens, which is one of the benchmarks of genuine western democracy. The experiences in many other African countries, especially South Africa, could be emulated elsewhere, for example, in Cameroon and the Central African Republic. The contributions of mass political mobilisation and awareness-building among civil society organisations to the achievement of social transformation in South Africa should serve as an inspiration to budding civil society organisations in other parts of Africa.

The idea of civil society is not new, but what appears to be new now is its organisation within the modern state and its presupposition of a global character. According to De Oliviera & Tandon (1994), human beings have always come together for a common cause, and the gregarious nature of humankind is expressed in an associational life of diverse character and objectives. This diverse character, according to Bayart (2009), should include villagers, fishermen, nomads, members of different age groups, village councilors, slum dwellers and all others who are, or feel they are without due access to state resources, as well as professionals, politicians, priest and mullahs, intellectuals and military officers. This human solidarity, with its holistic and philosophical origins, is known as civil society and nowadays requires greater citizen participation and influence more the affairs of modern states than ever before.

One of the drawbacks of democracy in the continent has been ethnicity. There is no doubt that civil society in Africa is threatened by the particularism of ethnicity and other atomistic tendencies (Woods, 1992). A fully developed civil society in Africa should help create norms that would help limit the character of ethnic and cultural particularism. It is unlikely, however, that a civil society will develop in Africa that is completely void of ethnic tensions and divisions, but structures can be created to contain the problem. The civil society in Africa should be questioning its own *raison d'etre* like other human institutions. By examining itself, it will know whether it is worthwhile. The growth of civil society requires organisational development to enable leaders to exercise influence over a government on behalf of its members. When this type of institutionalisation exists, even authoritarian regimes such as the one in erstwhile Apartheid South Africa will have to give grudging recognition to civil society (Sklar 1987).

The Gap between Urban and Rural Politics

The yawning gap between rural and the urban politics has been largely responsible for the inability of western style democracy to settle down in Africa. Inordinate focus on national level urban politics can lead to an inadequate understanding of forms of despotism in Africa and consequently the process by which such despotism might be transforming towards democracy. Thus we need to examine the ways in which rural majorities are

linked to urban-centered national politics. This is what Mamdani (1996) has coined as "decentralised despotism". A cursory observation of politicians and the political parties' secretariats shows that almost all are found in cities or urban areas. As elections approach, politicians rush to rural areas and within a few days their assignment with the rural areas is terminated. This paper holds, however, that there should be an equilibrium between rural and urban areas, thus closing or narrowing the gap between the two spheres for better functioning of democracy.

Conclusion

The process of democratisation which was re-launched in the 1990s ha been captured under the tutelage of competitive elections which found expression in the emergence of the multi-party system. This became noticeable in Ivory Coast, Togo, Cameroon, Gabon, Benin and Kenya. The democratic movements of 1990s howevers and also given birth to regimes that had very shallow and consequently very little knowledge awareness of the preconditions of future stability as they had major weakness, coupled with ethnicity, sit-tightism, divide and rule politics. These countries included *inter alia* Mali, Kenya, Togo, The Gambi, Senegal and Cameroon. Democracy also produced regimes which were and cannot be easily considered as genuinely democratic–Central Africa Republic, Congo until 1997; Equatorial Guinea, Zambia and Chad. In certain quarters democracy has been snuffed out by the intervention of armed forces like Nigeria, Niger and Burundi. All these point to the fact that there is great variety in the penetration and success of democratization in Africa. There are countries there that have never gotten a taste of democratization; there are those that followed the process of democratization but failed to consolidate democratic institutions and reversed themselves democratically; and there are those which have undergone change towards democracy and successfully maintained and acquired legacy. Thus it could be contended here that democracy has undergone considerable vicissitude in the continent.

Within two decades of the new wave of democracy in Africa, it has faced a myriad difficulties and challenges, although it has met them with some successes here and there. The reasons why it was so have been analysed in this paper. I am aware that Africa is a very diverse continent with its own peculiarities. Therefore the essay holds that the particular social, political and economic environment of the continent should be responsible for the type of government that will best serve the people of Africa. It is hoped that what could be seen as good elsewhere could as well be emulated here. Nevertheless, the fact is that Sub-Saharan Africa was prepared neither in the colonial period or in the postcolonial one for western democracy. Perhaps the time has come for Africa to initiate a democratic model based on its own past experiments with it that may be blended with the best of western practices of democracy.

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