Africa at 50+: Still Searching for the "Political Kingdom"

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Introduction

It is a great pleasure for me to be back in Addis Ababa and to be able to deliver a lecture on the state of democracy in Africa on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity, now renamed the African Union (AU). I want to extend my sincere thanks to the organizers of the event, namely the Institute for Peace and Security Studies at Addis Ababa University and the Social Science Research Council in New York.

I was a young elementary school student here in Addis Ababa and witnessed for two weeks in May 1963 the arrival of the leaders of many newly independent African countries who came to form what was then known as the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Emperor Haile Selassie had ordered that all schools in the capital be closed so that students could line the streets of Addis Ababa to welcome the arriving dignitaries. Some of these new leaders had to travel via Paris, London, or Brussels barely twelve hours after leading their countries to independence in order to make it to the city. Some could not make it to Addis for the formal signing of the OAU charter either because independence was delayed by a week or due to the fact that they could not charter a plane to be there. I was privileged to be

in the crowd and waved my hand to many legendary Pan-Africanists such as Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Modibo Keita (Mali), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Sekou Toure (Guinea), A. Ben Bella (Algeria), Nasser of Egypt, Julies Nyerere (Tanzania), and Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia), among others.

I should say that I am privileged to have lived a long life and to have witnessed the continent's political trajectory over many decades, the good times and the bad times, moments of shame and moments of pride. I have travelled, worked, researched, and consulted in more than twenty-seven African countries throughout my academic career. *So my reflections on the state of democracy in Africa this morning is informed by many years of critical engagement in the continent as a scholar-activist, researcher, and policy advisor.*

Where Has the Democratic Dividend Gone? A Score Card

This has been quite an extraordinary two decades for Africa—a time of both progress and regression at the same time. It is a moment where every bit of good news about the continent's economic renewal is greeted with signs of progressive erosion of democratic practices and a growing income gap between a relatively small elite

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and the vast majority of urban and rural poor. Behind the current popular narrative of a "rising Africa" lies a different Africa where the struggle for social, economic, and political inclusion are being contested. The majority of Africans less than thirty years old particularly feels alienated and represents the greatest threat to the social order.

It is, however, important to note at the outset that any attempt to explain the democratic deficit in Africa must first situate the problem in its proper historical context. As Adedeji (1993: 208) reminds us: "Dispossession and dependence, which amount to more than five hundred years of colonialism, have left a heavy imprint on Africa. Fifty years of independence is a very short time in which to reduce their impact, let alone transcend this legacy." Since the 1940s, the African continent has gone through four distinct but interrelated phases of political transition that have had profound implications for democracy and development. These include (a) the struggle for independence from colonial rule, (b) the post-independence experience with development and nation building, (c) the post-1980 experience with market-oriented economic reform under the "benevolent" guidance of the IMF and the World Bank, and (d) the post-1990 experience with multiparty democracy. Each stage of these transitions had been influenced by the colonial past and consequently constrained post-independence government's visions and aspirations to build economically vibrant, socially inclusive, democratically governed societies. In the pages that follow, we examine the progress, challenges, and the lost opportunities in each successive stage of Africa's development over the past fifty years.

Decolonization and the First Decade after Independence

To the extent that I have emphasized the importance of history, let me start by recounting the objectives, achievements, and shortcomings of the "nationalist project" of the 1950s and 1960s, whose aim was to overcome the institutional legacies of colonialism. Inspired by the political thinking of early nationalist

leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Modibo Keita, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Sekou Toure, to name a few, African nationalism sought to achieve five historic and humanistic tasks: decolonization, nation building, development, democracy, and regional integration (Zeleza 2008; Mkandawire 2007).

Soon after independence, African countries embarked on programs of nation building and national development designed to bring the fruits of social and economic growth to all sections of the population. Indeed, as a result of deliberate state actions, African economies registered impressive growth rates during the 1960s and early 1970s given the initial conditions at the time of independence. Physical infrastructures were greatly improved, particularly in the areas of health, education, and communication. New universities, agricultural research centers, national transport networks, and local government structures were established to facilitate the national development project. Elaborate social subsidies and social programs were also developed as part of the nation building project, which helped diffuse social tensions. In the space of less than a decade and a half, dramatic improvements in the parameters of social indicators—health, education, etc.—were registered.

While the other novel ideas of the nationalist movement—nation building, development, democracy, and regional integration—remain unfulfilled until today, it is important to acknowledge that the early nationalist leaders delivered the following: (a) independence from colonial rule and (b) the attempt to build nations out of artificially carved out territories. Remarkably, with few exceptions, the colonial borders have remained sacrosanct.

The Second Decade of Independence

As Africa entered the decade of the 1970s, however, the "nationalist project" of nation building, democracy, and development was threatened from within and without. This early

preoccupation with national unity and development had two unintended consequences. First, as Mkandawire (2007) insightfully points out, the tendency to emphasize national unity and nation building conveniently dismissed the existence of deep cleavages based on ethnicity, gender, class, and religion. Ethnicity and tribalism were officially banished, but in practice were the main criteria for distributing public resources. Thus, policies such as "indigenization" and "Africanization" were applauded in the face of growing intra-group inequality. It was wrongly assumed that these would disappear with further increases in economic growth that would trickle down to the rest.

Second, in a determination to accelerate development on the continent, what little effort was expended to promote political pluralism was undermined across the continent. Countries that almost invariably attained sovereignty on the basis of multiparty forms of governance soon dissolved into single-party and military regimes, resulting in a systemic reversal of the gains of independence. The first crop of post-independence leaders became too preoccupied with short- term considerations over long-term ones; power over welfare, personal over institutional considerations, national unity over democracy, and security over development.

Single-party regimes were justified on a number of grounds, including the fact that the ethnic diversities of African countries and the complexities associated with managing them, and the need for Africa to catch up quickly in development, were such that it would be better if the countries of the continent were united behind a single integrated political order. It was argued that a competitive multiparty political system will generate inter-ethnic conflict and will thus undermine the project of national unity and it should be discouraged.

In reality, however, single-party rule instead became a reproduction of ethnic domination and the institutionalized "exclusion of others." It was a self-fulfilling prophesy. Political leaders preached "nationalism by day" and practiced "tribalism by night" (Mkandawire 2007). The question of inclusion that was already a key argument justifying the dismantling of multiparty rule ultimately became translated into a continuing politics of "exclusion." This in turn began to sew the seeds of conflict among and between groups.

Thus, barely halfway into the second decade of independence, the vision of an independent and democratic Africa had started to fall apart and the gulf between state and society widened considerably in the process, as the "independence and democracy dividend" failed to materialize in real terms. Consequently, ordinary citizens began to perceive "development" and "nation building" as a deliberate attempt by the elites in power to level them into destitution. The familiar cry from the majority of poor people became, "Please don't develop us!"

The Third Decade: The Decade of Structural Adjustment

As Africa entered the 1980s, the problem of political exclusion and authoritarianism were further compounded by the economic regression of the continent. Whereas the impressive growth of the 1960s and 1970s made it also possible for the tolerance threshold for political authoritarianism to be manageable for governments, the economic crisis exposed the vulnerability of governing elites.

But with the economic crisis of the 1980s, in a context of exclusion, instability, and authoritarianism, popular discontent erupted across sub-Saharan Africa as citizens began to demand sweeping political and economic reforms and the introduction of multiparty democratic systems of government (Anyang Nyong'o' 1987; Joseph 1991; Beckman 1989; Mkandawire 1995; Cheru 1989). These popular uprisings came to be known as "Africa's second independence." They initially provided the most encouraging evidence of the creation of the new structures and values on which a substantial process of re-democratization must be built.

With nowhere to turn, African governments found themselves with no alternative but to embrace the IMF and the World Bank and to usher in the era of

"structural adjustment." Thus from the 1980s onward, conditional lending debt structures became the means by which African development was regulated from afar. Moreover, the World Bank and bilateral donors introduced the notion of "good governance" as a panacea to achieving economic reform. These donors propounded the idea that free markets and free elections must be essential components of aid programs in order to erase the tyranny of neo-patrimonial rule that was believed to hinder democracy and free markets in Africa.

In reality, what the donors were demanding was the removal of the institutional barriers to the operation of the market rather than a desire to create the necessary conditions for genuine democratic governance to take root. While donor conditionality was initially restricted to the economic realm, by the early 1990s restructuring the domestic politics of African countries became a prominent feature of structural adjustment programs. External donors propounded the idea that free markets and free elections must be essential components in aid programs in order to erase the tyranny of neo-patrimonial rule believed to hinder democracy and free markets (Gibbon, Bangura, and Ofstad 1994). In the process, what remained of the "development welfarism" of the 1960s and 1970s (including such popular programs as food subsidies, welfare programs, pan-territorial pricing, and indigenization) were completely eliminated or downgraded, as donors saw them as tantamount to corruption and patronage.

Thus, with the growing influence of donors in domestic policy decisions, African governments became more and more accountable to creditor nations and institutions rather than to their own citizens, as long as these externally imposed policies did not undermine their hold on power (Ake 1991, 32-44; Mkandawire 1995, 85; Beckman 1989). The state was declared "inefficient" and public services were first run down before being sold off. The state was prohibited from subsidizing agriculture and investing in social infrastructure. The net effect was to reduce the state to having a narrowly prescribed role in economic affairs and precious little authority or resources to devote to the development of social

infrastructure. Thus, policy making, an important aspect of sovereignty, was wrenched out of the hands of the African state.

The implementation of externally imposed austerity measures further deepened the conflict between state and society. As many people began to draw a direct connection between their economic plight and the paucity of basic liberties, local grievances quickly escalated into popular challenges to established systems of government. This terrain has increasingly been occupied by civic associations, women's groups, consumer unions, students, and environmental and human rights groups, which pressed their demands on the state through the "politics of claims," non- payment of taxes, urban riots, or through collective action to find solutions to common problems without the intervention of the state (Cheru 1989; Ihonvbere 1996, 343–67). These new popular organizations came to see the state as a dangerous, evil institution to be avoided, challenged, cheated, and destroyed if possible (Ihonvbere 1994, 42–60). This put them on a collision course with the authorities in power. So, it was the resistance to austerity measures that gave the impetus for the rise of oppositional groups in the 1980s and early 1990s. Interestingly, the Egyptian revolution of 2011 was also a product of decades of counterproductive economic policies that were pushed down the throat of the Egyptian people by the Mubarak regime, while the privatization program benefited his political cronies (Joya 2011, 367–86). The resistance against decades of austerity measures and the demand for political freedom and an end to authoritarian rule resulted in the outbreak of mass demonstrations in Tahrir square and around the country, which eventually brought to an end the Mubarak regime's hold on power.

Fourth Decade and the Democracy Movement of the 1990

The early 1990s was a period that constituted perhaps one of the most intensive moments in postcolonial African history for constitution making, the rewriting of constitutions, and the reform of electoral systems in order to usher in a new

era of democratic governance on the continent. This period coincided with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, which indirectly emboldened social movements across the world, much in the same way the current uprisings in North Africa have inspired popular movements across the Arab world. All of a sudden, everything seems possible.

With the ending of East-West competition, African dictators could no longer count on Washington or Moscow to come to their rescue.

Pressed against the wall, these autocratic leaders began, albeit reluctantly, to open up the political process. In 1990, all but five of Africa's fifty- four countries were dictatorships, either civilian or military (Rasheed 1996, 77). By 2000, the majority had introduced some form of political reforms. For example, between 1996 and 2006, forty-four elections were conducted in sub-Saharan Africa and between 2005 and 2007, twenty-six presidential and twenty-eight parliamentary elections were held in Africa. Several others had reasonably fair elections in which the governing party retained power: that is, generals shed their army uniforms and donned civilian clothes. In others, such as Uganda and Ethiopia, some degree of managed democratization took place under the leadership of political parties created by former guerrilla leaders. Even Mobuto Sese Seko bragged to the Americans that his country had surpassed the United States in democratic reform because it had over sixty political parties, which were mostly funded by Mobutu himself. However, they were portfolio parties that did not have significant presence on the ground.

In the final analysis, fifty-five years after the founding of the Organisation of African Unity, the central aspirations of the nationalist struggle, such as nation building, development, democracy, and regional integration, remain unfulfilled (Zeleza 2008; Mkandawire 2007). Nation building continues to pose challenges. While many countries have retained the integrity of colonial boundaries, many have had difficulties in forging nations out of them. Secondly, development that is inclusive remains elusive despite impressive GDP growth since the early 2000s. The deepening inequality is in particular a major concern

since democracy cannot flourish in an environment of deep social and economic cleavages. Similarly, the score card on regional integration is mixed. The AU has taken a good lead on this, but greater effort is needed to reduce the "compliance deficit" by member states. Finally, despite remarkable progress in democratization since 1989, democracy in Africa has not moved beyond the holding of elections.

What Is the State of Democracy in Africa Today?

Notwithstanding the remarkable political changes since the early 1990s, the overall assessment of the state of democracy in Africa in 2016 presents a rather mixed picture of both progress and regression (Lynch and Crawford 2011). I would argue that democracy in Africa today is in profound trouble and has not moved beyond the holding of multiparty elections. The aspirations of the masses for fundamental political and economic change have remained largely unfulfilled. This is due to the following important considerations. First, the fact that undemocratic rulers extend their hold on power through the ballot box or by annulling "term limits" through constitutional manipulation with increasing regularity serves as a sobering reminder how tentative and fragile the experiment with "liberal democracy" has been when the basic conditions of democracy—such as a strong and vibrant legislature, an independent judiciary, a free press, and strong accountability institutions—are not there or have either been weakened or corrupted and are thus unable to act as countervailing forces to an often powerful executive branch of government.

Second, the various groups that form the core of oppositional politics suffer from poor leadership and lack a common long-term vision of the type of democratic society they want to establish. They suffer from a poverty of ideas, institutions, and leadership. The new power-holders were often none other than the people who had served the single-party state faithfully in the previous decade without any great sign of guilt. They were simply political entrepreneurs who chose the right moment to break with the past and embrace the language of good

governance and respect for human rights (Ihonvbere 1996; Nzongola-Ntalaja 1995, 29). For these political entrepreneurs who present themselves as opposition leaders, democracy was largely a strategy for power, not a vehicle for popular empowerment.

In short, after more than fifty years of political independence, Africa remains a continent where democracy is being built without the bearers of the democratic project. This creates conditions where fundamentalist groups, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabab in Somalia, thrive politically, imposing their own version of extreme and anti-democratic political order.

Third, a disquieting feature of the crisis of democracy in Africa in 2016 has been the glaring disjuncture between the high GDP growth registered by many African countries since 2001 and the corresponding erosion of democratic practice by governing elites The return to the authoritarian impulses of the past is justified by governing elites on the false premise that to lift more people out of poverty, sustaining Africa's current economic revival should take priority over building democratic institutions (Diamond 2008; Lynch and Crawford 2011, 297). Rapid economic growth, the argument goes, is a precondition for democratic reform, although this is contestable. Therefore, the race to join the club of "high-performing economies," no matter the cost, has created a political culture of arrogance, indifference to, and complete disregard for accepted democratic norms and practices. As was the case during the "structural adjustment decade," democracy in Africa is once again being sacrificed on the altar of free-market economics.

Fourth, without doubt, the actions of the civil society groups and "social movements" that made up the core of the African pro-democracy movement of the 1990s have been commendable, considering the numerous obstacles they encountered. Nevertheless, the movements did not produce a network of independent "organs of people's power," in which the people have real power in decision-making, operating in parallel with and/or complementing state power, in order to nurture, promote, and defend democracy on a sustained basis (Nzimande and Sikhosana 1995, 48–65). With the exception of trade unions, few civil society groups (or social movements) that formed in the late 1980s survived past election day. This situation played well into the hands of the self-proclaimed leaders of newly established political parties who were able to manipulate the popular movement for their own narrow political interest. The critical challenge of the day is how to go about channeling the growing citizens' anger (expressed through their respective civil society organizations) into building more durable organs of people's power, parallel to and complementing state power. Without such organs of people's power, it is difficult to defend a democratic revolution from elite capture.

Fifth, the global obsession with the "war on terror" has had implications on democratic development. Many African governments conveniently embraced the Western project of the "war on terror" and began to outlaw any opposition groups by simply labeling them "terrorist organizations." Consequently, countless opposition leaders have been jailed, while many other human rights activists and movement leaders have been found dead under mysterious circumstances. By closely associating themselves with America's "War on Terror," many African governments were also able to benefit from generous US military and security assistance to bolster their domestic surveillance capacity and to quash any opposition. The interesting irony is that, whereas the end of the Cold War provided space for oppositional politics to flourish in Africa, the "war on terror" has had the opposite effect—to silence opposition groups in the name of fighting terrorism.

From Afro-Pessimism to Afro-Optimism

Fast forward to the early 2000s, which coincided with a fundamental change in how the world viewed Africa. The pervasive "Afro-pessimism" of the 1980s and 1990s—which the Economist aptly dubbed "Hopeless Africa"—has given way to an image of the continent that is socially and economically vibrant and politically more open, with an assertive civil society, an entrepreneurial

private sector, and an aggressive free press playing a central role in articulating an independent and authentic African development agenda.

The new African miracle cannot be attributed to a single source; it is the result of a combination of internal and external factors:

❖ First, among the internal factors, it is the result of the improvement of security in many conflict-ridden countries, Darfur, Mali, and Somalia notwithstanding. By the end of 2000, fifteen countries were still at war. That number has been reduced to five today. Peace has brought with it the opportunity for development. There is greater continental consensus on what needs to be done to prevent deadly conflict. We can partly credit the AU for this, although its capacity to pay for its own peacekeeping is years away.

❖ Second, many countries have learned from the mistakes they made in the 1980s and 1990s in regard to economic management. They have put in place appropriate macroeconomic, structural, and social policies, which have contributed to improved GDP growth rates. Governments, by and large, have learned from the bitter experience of the adjustment decades of the 1980s and 1990s on how to avoid macroeconomic mistakes, excessive borrowing, and uncontrollable spending that gave rise to growth collapse in the past. That is why the continent proved its resiliency through quick recovery from the global financial crisis of 2008.

❖ Third, there is greater consensus among Africans now on what needs to be done to accelerate growth, reduce poverty, and prevent conflict. Regional initiatives under the AU and NEPAD are allowing African countries to improve governance (APREM), assume leadership and accountability for their development, increase trade within Africa and the world, and enhance regional public goods such as cross-country transportation and electricity pooling.

While there is good reason to be optimistic about the continent's future, important challenges still remain.

Let us just look at a few anomalies when we speak about the "Rise of Africa":

❖ The sources of Africa's growth have changed very little over the years: agriculture and natural resources remain the main drivers. For example, in 2009, crude petroleum, natural gas, was 60% of total goods exported from the continent. Much of this does not involve any value-addition; resource rents are not collected appropriately (see the Annan report on minerals).

❖ Efforts at diversifying economies away from commodities have remained very slow, although some countries are making steady progress (e.g., Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Ghana).

❖ Much of the recent growth has been "jobless growth." The most pressing issue is how to tackle the widespread poverty—particularly youth unemployment. It is a ticking time bomb that can go off anytime.

The current narrative on "the Rise of Africa" does not capture these dichotomies. If you are part of those included that resides in the plush part of Addis, Nairobi, or Lagos, "Africa is indeed rising." But if you live in any of the slums of Africa or in rural areas of the continent, the only thing rising is the price of bread, electricity, and transportation. Growth has to be inclusive. It goes without saying that constructing a viable "social contract" is fundamental if Africans are going to live in peace.

In Search of an "Emancipatory" Democratic Future

The political and economic grievances that gave rise to oppositional politics in the late 1980s remain unresolved to this day. Poverty, inequality, social exclusion, and the denial of basic political and social rights have become widespread and entrenched phenomena. A particularly disquieting feature of the present political order has been the dramatic erosion of political space for democratic expression at a time when many African countries are enjoying their highest level of economic growth in many decades (Lynch and Crawford 2011,

275–310). The fundamental question remains: what is to be done to end the vicious cycle of repression, marginalization, and dashed hopes that have been a permanent feature of African political life?

There is no need at this juncture to debate what type of democracy is appropriate for Africa. That is an abstract theoretical exercise not worth dwelling on. Democracy is good in its own right, and certainly Africans, like others, have a "right" to enjoy and exercise democracy. No matter what form it takes, democracy has to be an authentic expression of the people themselves, grounded in African historical realities, values, and heritage.

The only distinction here is that an "emancipatory" democratic project needs to go beyond the singular liberal focus on abstract rights and stress concrete economic rights (Ake 1993, 241). In other words, a new mode of politics must aim to bring about the material emancipation of oppressed people. This view, expressed in the 1990 African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, emphasized the following elements of "emancipatory" politics (UNECA 1990):

A. A democracy in which people have real decision-making power over and above the formal consent of electoral choice. This will entail a powerful legislature, a decentralization of power to local democratic formations (i.e., organs of people's power), and considerable emphasis on the development of institutions for the aggregation and articulation of interests.
B. A social democracy that places emphasis on concrete political, social, and economic rights, as opposed to a liberal democracy that emphasizes abstract political rights, will be a social democracy that invests heavily in the improvement of people's health, education, and capacity so that they can participate effectively.
C. A democracy that puts as much emphasis on collective rights as it does on individual rights will have to recognize nationalities, sub-nationalities, ethnic groups, and communities as social formations and to guarantee their rights to cultural expression and political and economic participation on an equal basis (Ake 1993, 244;

Mengisteab 1997). This would mean, for example, a second legislative chamber of nationalities with considerable power in which all nationalities, irrespective of their numerical strength, are equal.

These important attributes of democracy cannot be prescribed. Rather, they will have to emerge from practical experience and improvisation in the course of hard struggle. The experience of the late 1980s and 1990s has taught us that multiparty elections in Africa are merely the beginning, and not the end, of the democratization process.

What Is the Future of an "Emancipatory" African Democratic Project?

Democracy is always a "work in progress" and it requires the active participation of organized interest groups ready to fight for their respective social rights and to sustain and defend democratic values and practices. The sheer scale and diversity of social struggles in Africa are difficult to capture in this short lecture. These struggles have challenged not only the policies, but even the character of regimes. The concerns of these movements have been economic (unemployment, declining real wages), social (cuts to welfare services), and political (repression, lack of human rights), all testament to the misdirection of resources and accountability. These grievances are not new: they predate the present period of popular resistance.

There is no denial, as Issa Shivji (2006, 6) asserts, "a new democratic revolution on a Pan-African scale is on the agenda, both as a form of resistance and an alternative framework for reconstruction." Yet, as we have observed from the recent uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia and the pro-democracy movement of the early 1990s, mass political protest does not necessarily produce substantive political change unless it is anchored in strong organs of people's power, such as labor unions and political parties with a clear political manifesto that represents the aspirations of the people.

Unfortunately, the majority of oppositional groups are organized around single individuals, lack permanency, and their social base remains unclear. They tend to be built around individuals rather than intuitional structures/principles and tend to collapse when the individuals are coopted, subjected to increased harassment by the state, imprisoned, or, in extreme cases, "taken-out." There is little institutional continuity between the social movements of today and those of the 1990s. The newness of today's generation of social movements stems from the absorption of the old avenues of opposition into post-1990s multiparty governments, thus leaving opponents without a "voice" or a mechanism to organize opposition.

The Residual Option

The pervasiveness of the institutional and ideological vacuum that characterizes many social movements in Africa today makes it difficult to build credible mass movements capable of achieving transformative political change any time soon. However, it is reasonable to predict, based on past history that the struggle for democracy could take two or three routes, or three at the same time depending on the circumstances. It could take the form of visible and invisible resistance, including armed struggle.

❖ Silent resistance and the politics of disobedience is what James C. Scott (1993) and Cheru (1997) refer to as "everyday forms of resistance," whereby individuals engage in acts of "disobedience" against the state, including the non-payment of taxes, sabotage, and foot dragging, to demonstrate their anger at the perceived hostility of the states toward them. Similar actions took place in 18th- and 19th-century Britain by the peasantry in response to the expropriation of land (Thompson 1980) and in China (Scott 1993) to disastrous agricultural collectivization during Mao's ill-fated Great Leap Forward, which produced mass starvation.

❖ Mass mobilization complements "silent resistance" and is the continued engagement of civil society organs in mass mobilization to press demands on the state. This can take the form of lobbying, industrial action, demonstrations, and petitioning through the courts.

❖ Armed struggle is the third option, although no one can predict the eventual destination of guerilla movements in terms of renewing and restoring a democratic form of rule. Although recent experiences in Africa with regime change through armed struggle (e.g., Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea) have given it a bad name, such an option cannot be completely off the table when discussing democratic political change in Africa (Mkandawiere 2002). When oppressed people are denied the opportunity to bring change through peaceful means, they will not hesitate to pick up arms as a last resort.

While acknowledging that all three options are on the table, we should also consider a number of vital issues that are important for renewing and restoring democracy in Africa:

1. Pay Attention to "Everyday Forms of Resistance"

Recent experience tells us that political changes occur in ways that are not predictable. Just because an authoritarian regime is in power does not mean democratic pressures do not exist. This implies that we pay attention to what occurs on the ground—to the kind of issues that are characterized as "low level politics," issues that are central to everyday life. Thus, exclusively focusing on the big macro issues (e.g., transparency index, etc.) do not help us to discover the dialectics of change and how it is articulated in every society. Because we often take a pro-forma approach to understanding democracy and democratic politics, we fail to see the growing pressure from below borne out of frustration that accumulated over time.

Therefore, the struggles that needed to be undertaken, sometimes violent, sometimes hidden, and sometimes subterranean, constitute an important element, and we need always to build into our analysis the understanding of change.

2. Build an Effective and Functioning State

If building democracy is a political process, it cannot exclude the very central issue of state power. Although the state in Africa has been the object of popular resistance, let us not mistakenly assume that you can ever build any society on a democratic footing without having an effective and functioning state system in the first place. Indeed, part of the struggle is precisely how to build a functioning and effective state that responds to the concerns of the various constituencies, as opposed to simply serving the interest of a narrow class that often dominates its affairs. What type of state is wanted and how mass organizations should participate is critical to an "emancipatory democratic project" in Africa.

3. Strengthening the Organs of Civil Society

While the liberal conception of democracy assigns civil society a restricted "watchdog" role to check the excesses of state power, an "emancipatory" democratic national project aims to transfer substantive power to the people through a network of people's organizations. The central question that faces us is how civic and other mass organizations becomes part of the national democratic revolution without at the same time sacrificing their independence. This is the ugly truth that the protesters in Egypt and Tunisia have come to realize (Mamdani 2011). Overthrowing an unpopular regime is one thing, but building a durable foundation for democracy—where the people wield real power—is quite another.

4. Constructing a Viable "Social Contract"

While multiparty elections are important formal criteria, they are by no means sufficient to judge the democratic qualities of a society. Seen from this perspective, the economic programs of multiparty African governments have done little to build the foundations of participatory democracy, generate inclusive growth, reverse the productivity decline in agriculture, and extend essential social protection services to the majority of the population. In impoverished and increasingly unequal societies such as Africa, democracy cannot be separated from the social agenda. Political freedom and participation cannot be divorced from other kinds of freedom: there is an organic link between political freedom and freedom from hunger, ignorance, and diseases (Sen 1999; Mkandawire 2007; Adesina 2007).

In every political system, there must be a bargain to being a member of that political community. A social bargain is the glue that keeps a political community together. It is the social bargain that makes me a member of a political community, which is also why I seek to exert accountability as a member of that political community and also to exercise my active citizenship. This is the arena of citizenship; it is the arena of the articulation of the relationship between state and society that formalized "social contracts" that become an essential ingredient of the nature of the political community.

5. Recognize the Right of Nationalities

In ethnically diverse African countries, ethnic nationalism cannot be swept under the carpet. We have to come to terms with this issue. Regionalism and decentralization (including secession) can go a long way in addressing this issue. Though it has its own limitations, Ethiopia's bold experiment in "ethnic federalism" was an attempt to address longstanding problems of ethnic nationalism and intra-ethnic conflicts (Mengisteab 1997).

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, there is no reason why the 21st century should not become "Africa's century." But this requires strong political leadership from the top—leadership that is committed and capable of mobilizing the population around a common "national project." The task for African leaders in the coming decades is, therefore, to build on the gains of recent years by strengthening democratic governance, investing in people and in critical infrastructure, and in building effective state institutions to drive the structural transformation agenda.

As we look ahead toward 2063, a lot is at stake for the African Union and its member states. There is no room for stupid mistakes. There is no room for reckless leadership! The current generation of young Africans is not prepared to give the older generation a license so that we can ruin their future. Times have changed. Consciousness among the current generation is high and they are confident that they are in a position to determine their future and to build a democratic society. Their message to the current generation of African political leaders is the following: "If the leaders fail to lead, then the people must be prepared to lead!" The challenge for the AU in the coming decades is how to inspire our people and to embark on a process of "self- discovery"—to believe that we alone can transform Africa for Africans.

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