

The Politics And Ideological Practices Of Democracy in Africa: Strengths and Weaknesses for the Left's Program

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Discourses on democracy and democratization in Africa are usually presented in the west as though they are entirely new notions and practices to Africans. The democracy itself is viewed almost exclusively as a western concept of which African societies now in need. Similarly, the presumption has been that democratic values and practices are alien to the African Continent. These mindset thoughts

And hence they should be infused with "civilize" notion of western democracy what has been consistently ignored that democratic values and processes have been indigenous to Africans traditional political cultures and organization would give credence to this conclusion. While the term democracy, now a western buzzword for representative government, might have been borrowed from the Greeks, democratic thought and values have never been exclusively Greek or Euro-American preserve. Indeed, the desire for representation, inclusion, and participation in public affairs-essential elements of democracy-are universal to all humans, the difference rests in the methods of attaining these goals. to what extent a society "democratizes" is incontestably dependent on it's sociocultural milieu, whether it's African, European, or Asian societies. In analyzing the prospect of democracy in Africa it may be necessary

To distinguish between ultimate goals and necessary instruments

For achieving them. It would make sense for Africa to distinguish

Between fundamental right, and instrumental right. The right to vote for example, is an instrumental right designed to help us achieve the fundamental right of governmental by consent. The right to a free press is an instrumental right designed to help us achieve the open socially and freedom of information. By the same token we can distinguish between democracy as mean And democracy as goal. The most fundamental of the goals of Democracy are probably four in number. Firstly, to make the rules accountable and answerable for their action and policies. Secondly to make the citizens effective participants in choosing those rules and in regulating their action. Thirdly to make the society as open, and the economy as transparent as possible; and fourthly to make the social order fundamentally just equitable to the greatest number possible.(Ali A.mazuri,albert Schweitzer, Albertlinthnli and anderw Diwhite 2001).

If the goals of democracy are the same while the means of achieving them differ, are there African means of achieving those same goals of accountability of rulers, participation of the citizens, facing constitution makers in Africa-how to keep the democratic goals constant while looking for democratic means more appropriate to Africa, as noted by Manure.

Democracy and Development:

The second big issue about democracy in Africa concerns its relationship to development. On this relationship between democracy and development in Africa, one crucial question has persisted

.Is Africa underdeveloped because it is primarily undemocratic? Or is Africa undemocratic because it is primarily underdeveloped? Which is cause and which is effect?

There is a third dimension which is treated either as part of package of development or as part the package of democracy, when in fact it should be treated as a kind of independent variable. The third dimension is stability-but not necessary in that order. Alleviation of poverty is one of the fruits of

democratized development. Alleviation of poverty is one of the gains when democracy and development are jointly stabilized and truly humanized.

Democratic practice in Africa:

The experience of democratic practice in Africa was faced by many problems. The experience was new to many African countries. The constitutions that were inherited from the colonial powers were adopted in a hurry without the chance for people to look for alternatives that suit African societies. For example, in former British Africa this meant the adoption in Ghana,Nigeria,Kenya,Sudan and elsewhere the Westminster model of parliamentary government. This was the phase of high political imitativeness as African imitated western forms but not western substance. There was a major disconnect between the imported institutions and the cultural realities of Africa. The imported paradigm did not work.

Democracy needs the prevalence of some essential conditions, such a fair level of education, a minimum level of economic development for it to flourish. However, African societies suffer from illiteracy and lack of development.

Again, those who took power in these countries were not trained in the practice of democracy. Hence within the course of the first years African leaders began the search of alternative system that could lead to their national unity, stability and development. Most African leaders ,therefore adopted the one party system which they thought would unite their people around one party within which they could practice democracy. These leaders find that western-style democracy places people into artificial antagonistic boxes, turn enemies, and aims at arousing unnecessary competition. Many of them consider the western model of democracy to be extremely narrow and even alien to African cultures, and democracy is not merely the right to vote and seize power. For them the multi party system serves to plant conflict in society. That is unstable and leads to the disintegration of their socites.Some of them like Nyrere,Nkrumah and others have even theorized for the

advantages of the single party on the grounds that Africa has no classes to be represented by political parties as the west. They maintained that Africa societies are democratic by nature, where elders sit in the shade and discuss until they reach agreements by all.

Unfortunately, this turned not to be so.

Experience with the one party system proved to be a failure, and most countries today returned to multi-party systems. However, this return did not mean the adopting genuine democracy. The values of democracy are still absent, freedom of organization, human rights, accountability as well as the culture of democracy are still lacking.

The left in Africa:

The left in Africa has taken many forms with different programmes. Some African leaders during the 1960's and 1970's have adopted the Marxist ideology, some were populists. So we have no single programme for the left.

The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union was a serious blow for the left in Africa. All forms of socialism, populism, and communism have failed to serve their societies, and in the wake of the domination of the market economy during the last decades all Africa countries have turned to the market-economy. However, this was not a choice for all of them, rather it is the lack of an alternative programme.