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THE FUTURE PROSPECTS OF MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

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THE FUTURE PROSPECTS OF MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

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I. Introduction

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, almost all sub-Saharan African countries gained their political independence from colonial rule on a formular of multi-party democracy. In the former British colonies in particular, competitive political party politics were organised over long periods of time. The organisations involved allowing for the registration of political parties, constitutional negotiations which were in most cases acceptable to all parties, and finally the holding of general elections, for self-government and independence, on the a basis of universal adult surface.

In almost all of the cases, the negotiated constitution gave guarantees for values which are normally associated with Liberal democracy. These are supremacy and autony of a representative national assembly, independence of the judiciary, separation of powers of the executive, parliament and judiciary, checks and balance between these three branches for government, freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom of conscience and many other basic human rights. The constitutions also incorporated bills of right. In short almost all these former colonies had made a giant step towards building a foundation for liberal democratic governments.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s almost all of these countries had abandoned multi-party politics. A number of them were under military dictatorship; others were governed by authoritarian single political parties; while the rest were under one personnel rule. Indeed it was only in the Gambia, Senegal and Botswana that multi-party politics was still being practiced.

The collapse of multi-party politics in sub-Saharan countries were accompanied with severe repression of the general population and an abuse of other basic human rights. Besides, the economies of these countries, which at independence were relatively stronger, began to decline rapidly. In the meantime, corruption among government officials became endemic; while most of the socio-physical infrastructure, such as

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The collapse of multi-party politics in sub-Saharan countries were accompanied with severe repression of the general population and an abuse of other basic human rights. Besides, the economies of these countries, which at independence were relatively stronger, began to decline rapidly. In the meantime, corruption among government officials became endemic; while most of the socio-physical infrastructure, such as

roads, education and health services simply broke down. The general decline of economic growth and the collapse of various socio-physical infrastructure in sub-Saraha Africa have been attributed to bad governance and a lack of democracy. Although the West was aware of the rampant nature of bad governance and authoritarianism in Africa, it failed to condemn the paractices forcefully. Indeed, in some cases the West participated in propping-up and supporting some of the worst dictators in the region. This was partly due to the ideological rivalry between the West and the former 'Communist block' --- a rivalry whose main purpose was to secure military strategic positions and markets in the region. But despite the reluctance of the west to forcefully condemn, and in some cases stop supporting authortarianism and bad governance in Africa, domestically, a number of groups had started agitating for change as early and mid 1960s. In most cases, the nature of change agitated for by these groups was never clearly defined; nor was the nature of change sought universal.

Nevertheless, when the former 'Communist block' collapsed in the late 1980s the West saw no more need to prop-up or support authoritative regimes in Africa. Instead, the West began to forcefully promote the values which have been associated with liberalism ever since, namely, liberilization of the economy, transparency, accountability and multi-party politics. It was these liberal ideas that the internal groups which had all along agitated for change finally embraced. Suddenly, the interest of the West and those of the internal groups agitating for change converged. A combined pressure of these two forces finally forced authoritarian leaders in the region to accept change to multi-partyism.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s a number of African countries have adopted multi-party 'democracy'. In some of these countries, successful national elections involving more than one political parties have been held. In others, similar elections are in the process of being conducted. In some of the countries where successful general elections have been conducted, the former authoritarian leaders have been defeated; while in others the incumbents retained their positions.

Given the fact that a majority of these countries which are now reverting to multi-partysim initially gained their political independence from colonial rule through a similar system before reverting to single-party dictatorship, why should we be optimistic this time round that

competitive party politics is going to be sustained in the region? What factors led to the initial attempts to establish liberal democracy in the continent? What factors led to their collapse? Have these militating factors been eradicated? What are the objective material conditions necessary for the rise and sustainance of liberal democracy? By attempting to answer the above questions, this paper seeks to assess the future prospects of multi-party democracy in Africa. In the process, we hope to contribute to the on-going debate in the democratization process in the region.

II The theory of liberal democracy

In order to be able to appropriately assess the future prospects of multi-partyism in Africa, it is important to understand the theory of liberal democracy and its historical development, especially from its classical birth place - the West. This is because those who agitate for multi-partyism hope that the system is likely to transform African societies into liberal democratic societies. But, first, let's begin by understanding what is meant by democracy in general.

In its simplistic and original sense, the concept democracy is derived from the Greek work ***demokratia*** which literally means "rule by the people" (Dahl 1989, 3). This form of governance was first practiced by the ancient Greek City-States, especially Athens, towards the middle of the fifth Century B.C. (Plato 1987, 26; Dahl 1989, 3). According to the Athenian democracy, 'the people' comprised of adult male citizens of the entire City-State. The people made up the total voting population.

Within this body of voting, citizens popular control was complete. This is because the concept of representation was unknown among the Greeks. The entire voting adult male citizens was the Assembly in Athens; and the Assembly was the sovereign body. Every adult male citizen had a right to attend the Assembly, participate in the deliberations, and vote on all political decisions. Although the Assembly, was the sovereign body, it was not practicable for it to meet too often. In theory it was supposed to meet ten times a year. However, in practice it met more often, though probably never more than once a week.

To deal with the matters of the state between meetings, such as routine and financial matters, and to draft business for meetings of the Assembly, there was a Council of Five Hundred. This was further divided into committees of fifty. Each Committee was responsible for carrying on public business during one-tenth of the year (Plato 1987, 26-27). Membership to the Council was chosen by lot from the citizen body. Membership was limited to one year; and no citizen was expected to hold membership more than twice.

Law-Courts were also under popular control of the citizen body. Nearly all cases were tried before pannels of jurors drawn by a system of mixed lot and elections from the citizen body; and before these pannels the magistrates could be tried for any irregularities committed during their year of office (Plato 1987, 27). This form of complete popular control of governance has never been practiced elsewhere before or since the ancient Anthens (Plato 1987, 27; Dahl 1989, 13). Although the principle of popular control appears to have been quite well grounded in the Athenian democracy, the system was neither complete nor liberal. The immediate problem was with what really constituted the people.

According to Desmond Lee, the translator of Plato's ***Republic,*** at the peak of ancient Athenian democracy, the City-State had a population of between 200-300,000 people; out of this, 60 - 80,000 were 'metics'. 'Metics' were those who although they resided in the city, could not qualify for citizenship because they had been born elsewhere. Both the slaves and 'metics' were not entitled to vote. Besides, women also did not qualify to vote. It is estimated that the voting population was roughly 35-45,000 people only. In modern standards, this limited suffrage would definitely be regarded undemocratic. This means that in its modern simplistic sense democracy can be defined to mean 'rule by the majority', depending on how this majority is arrived at.

Another limitation of the ancient Athenian democracy is that the system was liberal. Within the Athenian body politics, there was no room for competitive party politics. The entire voting population was the Assembly and the Assembly was sovereign; so there was really no need for political parties. There were, however, factions based on family ties and friendship (Dahl 1989, 20-21).

The reason the Athenians were able to evolve this type of democracy was because their City-State was relatively smaller than the current modern nation-states, both in terms of population and region size. The society also was relatively more self-sufficient. The society had a large population of slaves whose labour power could be appropriated by the citizens to produce adequate goods for the society. The other large population of 'metics' also paid taxes which financed the affairs of the state. Finally, women also provided some form of labour, since they did qualify to vote. The contributions of these three different categories of the Athenian society -- slaves, metics, and women -- to the material well-being of the society, thus made it possible for adult male citizens of Athens to form the Assembly. In this context it was possible for the Athenian adult male citizens to spend most of their time deliberating on matters of state in the Assembly, without worrying as to whether or not a part of their labour power was required in the production of material goods for the society.

The Greek City-State democracies collapsed as a result of the expansion of the Roman Empire. In their places, emerged a new form of governance, namely, republicanism. The philosphical content of republicanism may be traced to Aristotle. But in practice, republicanism is a combination of classical Greek City-State democracies, representative government, and aristocratic and monarchical rule (Dahl 1989, 24). The central idea that the republican tradition borrowed from Aristotle was his famous philosophical assertion that "man is by nature a social and political animal". In order for men to fulfill their potentialities, human beings must live together in a political association; a good man must also be a good citizen; a good polity is an association constituted by good citizens; a good citizen possesses the quality of civic virtue; virtue is the predisposition to seek good of all in puletic matters; a good polity, therefore, is one that not only reflects, but also promotes the virtue of its citizens (Dahl 1989, 25). But the republicans acknowledged the fragility of civic virtue. They saw the continuous competition between good polity and civic virtue. They noted that there were possibilities for people or their leaders to become corrupt. This would lead to the decay of the civic virtue; it would make a republic impossible to sustain.

A major threat to civic virtue, according to republicans, is generated by factions and political conflicts. These in turn, result from the fact that the people is not a perfectly homogenenous body, with identical interests. The people is normally divided into an aristocratic or oligarchic elements and democratic or popular component -- the few and the many -- each with somewhat different interests. Given the diversity of the body politic, it is the duty of republicans to design a constitution that reflect and somehow balances the interests of the one, the few and the many by providing for a mixed government of democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy, so constituted that all the three components will finally concur in the good of all" (Dahl 1989, 25). The constitution of the republican Rome with its system of consuls, senate and tribunes of the people was modelled along these lines. The same model was later adopted by the British constitution in the eighteenth century.

Although the republican tradition justified its constitutional model of mixed government on the need to maintain the fragility of civic virtue, it is important to note that the constitution of republican Rome was largely influenced by the social content of the Roman society. The ancient republican society of Rome was divided along distinct social classes. These included the monarchy, aristocracy, citizens, commoners, serfs and slaves.

Given the nature of the Roman society, 'democracy' if it had to be practiced, it was possible only if the various interests were represented. But these interests could not be represented within one assembly of 'the people'. The distinct social class divisions of the Roman society made this inappropriate, and hence the constitutional arrangement of mixed government. Like was the case in the ancient Greek City-State democracies, the republican Rome also was a non liberal 'democracy'.

Liberal democracy traces its origins from the liberal pholosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; from the republican tradition; from the idea of representative government; and from classical Greece. Besides these sources, the objective material conditions which facilitated the rise of liberal were the industrial revoultion and emergence of the bourgeoisie as an hegemonic social class. The original birth place of this new development was England (Macpherson 1966; Nabudere 1978; Dahl 1989).

In the mid seventeenth century, the manufacturing class in England, hitherto sandwitched between the landed aristocracy and merchants, managed to evolve into a bourgeoisie, although still in embryoic stage. This development became possible because, the merchants, despite having accumulated a large amount of capital decided to purchase land instead of investing in manufacturing. The rapid acquisition of land by the merchants forced a large rural population into urban centres as free labour (Nabudere 1978, 26). The arrival of this new free and cheap labour into the urban centres helped to boost the manufacturing sector. This in turn led to new investments into research in science and industry, and into the invention of new machines. The process eventually unleashed the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution brought into being a new system of property relations, especially between labour and capital (Nabudere 1978,27).

Once the bourgeoisie emerged, it began to demand the dismantling of the old restriction which had been imposed by the merchants. It demanded laissez-faire. The bourgeoisie readily found liberal philosophies both in politics and economics which justified their position. These included the literary works of writers such as John Locke, Jean Jacque Rousseau, David Hume, John Stuart Mill, Montesquiue, and Adam Smith.

One of the liberal theories upon which the bourgeoisie based its position was utilitarian theory. The utilitarian theory brows from the ancient Greek philosophy, especially from Aristotle. Aristotle had argued that the human essence is activity in pursuit of a conscious, rational purpose. This, the utilitarians changed; they now asserted that the essence of rational behaviour was maximization of individual utilities. So the human essence was rational action which maximized utilities (Macpherson 1966, 50).

Utilitarian theory assumed that men's desires for all kinds of satisfaction are naturally unlimited; so men will infact go on seeking to maximize them. Since desires were unlimited, the means of satisfying them would always be scarce. The task of the bourgeoisie, therefore, was to find the system which would employ the scarce means to produce the

maximum satisfactions. The problem was solved by demonstrating that the way to maximize utilities over the whole of a society, was to leave everything to a competitive market economy, upheld by a liberal state. According to C.B. Macpherson, "the justifying theory of liberal democracy has leaned heavily on this theory of maximization ever since." (Macpherson 1966, 50-51).

The reason the bourgeoisie insisted on establishing a competitive market economy, upheld by a liberal state was because it felt this was the only way by which it could dismantle the restrictions which had been imposed by merchant capital. In the place of restrictions, the bourgeoisie wanted a liberal society in which men were free to make choice. These included a choice of the type of government to govern; a choice of candidates to be elected into the government; a choice of political parties to belong; a choice of whom to work for and do business with; a choice of goods to purchase with the incomes earned; a choice of religion, and a choice of where to live. In this type of society, the bourgeoisie expected to establish its hegemony.

To make a liberal society to function, you needed a government. But a government was to be put in a market situation. It was to be treated as the supplier of certain political goods -- not only political goods of law and order in general -- but other specific goods demanded by those who had the upper hand in running that particular kind of society (Macpherson 1966, 8). The specific political goods demanded of the government were laws and regulations, and tax structure which could make the market society work. The other political goods included state services such as defence, education, sanitation and a transport network that could make the system run efficiently and profitably. In order to ensure that the government supplied these political goods, the power was to be put into the hands of men who were made subject to periodic elections involving a free choice of candidates and political parties. To make the political choices an effective one, there had to be certain liberties. These included freedom of association, freedom to form political parties, freedom of speech and publication. The freedom of speech and publication were particularly paramount because without them, the freedom of association would have been of no use.

This, then, is how the liberal state came into being. It did not emerge peaceully and suddenly. It required a revolution to bring it about. In England this took place in the seventeenth century, in America in the eighteenth century, and in France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It spread to most Western countries through a variety of methods sometimes within these centuries (Macpherson 1966, 8). In each of the Western countries the liberal state spread, it became influenced by the objective material conditions and cultures obtaining in each country, but its basic tenets and mission remained the same.

There was really nothing democratic about the liberal state. For a long time, the franchise was confined to men of substance (mainly the bourgeoisie) to ensusre that the government was responsive to their choices. In almost all the cases where a liberal state was established, the other subordinate social classes and women lacked the vote. The vote was granted to these social classes and women only once the bourgeoisie was satisfied that the liberal state was fully established and the other subordinate social classes would not use their vote to overthrow the liberal state. Women on the other hand, were franchised only when a majority of them began to leave the home and obtain wage employment.

The franchisation of the subordinate social classes and women also did not come easily and quickly. The process was brought about by the very logic of the market system. The subordinate social classes who lacked the vote saw that they had no weight in the political market; without the vote, their interests could not be consulted by the liberal state.

Using the general liberties of freedom of association, those who lacked the vote began to organize themselves to demand it. And when they did so, the system found no defensible ground for withholding the vote from them. This was because, the "liberal society had always justified itself as providing equal individual rights and equality of opportunity (Macpherson 1966, 9). The democratization process of the liberal state in Western Europe took a long period of time. In some of the countries, genuine liberal democratic state was not achieved until late in the nineteenth century. The female half of the population had to wait even much longer to be franchised.

For example, until the second decade of the twentieth century, only New Zealand (1893) and Australia (1902) had extended the suffrage to women in national elections. (South Australia did so in 1894). In France and Belgium, in fact, women did not gain the suffrage in national elections until after the second world war. In Switzerland, where universal suffrage was legally established for males in 1848, well before any other country had done so, the suffrage in nationalf elections was not guaranteed for women until 1971. And in the United States of America, blacks were excluded from voting until early 1960s (Dahl 1989, 129, 235).

To summarize: the emergence of liberal democracy in Western Europe required, first, the establishment of a competitive market society upheld by a liberal state. The establishment of a liberal state was preceded by the emergence of a national bourgeoisie. The national bourgeoisie determined, through periodic competitive elections, who among its members could be entrusted with power to manage the affairs of the liberal state. The sole purpose of the liberal state was to ensure that the market society functioned efficiently and profitably. During the initial period of these developments, a majority of the population was excluded from voting process. It was once the liberal society had been fully established and accepted by the majority of the population that the bourgeoisie submitted to the demands of the subordinate social class and women to acquire the vote. In short, " it was the liberal state that was democratised and in the process, democracy was liberalized" (Macpherson 1966, 5). Given this background, how, then can we understand the Africa situation?

III The African situation

In Africa, one of the major transforming factors was colonialism. Colonialism transformed African societies in two major ways. Firstly, it effectively brought African societies into the world capitalist system. Secondly, it created new nation-states out of various multi-nationalities, and imposed a colonial state on them. In almost all the cases, the various nationalities which were grouped together into new nation-states had very little in common, except that all of them were pre-capitalist societies.

The way in which capitalism developed in Africa differed quite widely from the way in which it took place in Europe. Whereas in England, its classical birth place, capitalism emerged as a result of the initiatives of a small stratum of the national bourgeoisie, in Africa, the process was brought about through the colonial state. Eager to make the new colonies economically viable and profitable, the colonial state began by imposing taxes on the indigenous population and also by propping-up an entrepreneural class.

The new entrepreneural class was initially recruited largely from the colonising nation. The methods of recruitment took various forms. In the colonies where large-scale commercial agriculture was possible, for example in Eastern and Southern Africa, white colonial settlements were encouraged; whereas in other colonies, the new immigrants were given monopolies in commerce and manufacture of primary goods (Brett, 1973; Cliffe and Lawrence, 1977; Sorrenson, 1968).

In order to be able to pay the imposed taxes, a large population of able bodied indigenous Africans was forced to go out and look for wage employment (Van Zwanenberg, 1975). Within a short period, therefore, the colonial state had managed to create two distinct social classes necessary for a capitalist development -- wage labourers on the one hand, and owners of capital on the other. The capitalist relations of production was thus set in motion.

Although the colonial market societies were relatively competitive and colonial state fairly liberal, the class content of capitalist development in the colonies assumed a racial character. Worried that if allowed to compete with them equally, in agriculture, commerce and industrial sectors, and in public bureaucracy, the African would undermine their hegemonic position; the colonial settlers in conspiracy with the colonial state, frustrated every efforts by the Africans to join the ranks of the colonial bourgeoisie.

Given the fact that the colonial system had successfully managed to create 'support classes' such as colonial chiefs and administrators, western educated middle class, merchants, and rich middle farmers, it is

inconceivable that these social groups would have agitated for political independence when it did had the colonial state removed the racial barier to their social mobility. Due to this fact, the racial content of the colonial capitalist development must be seen as the immediate cause for the demand for political independence by the African nationalists. The other factor was, of course, the undemocratic nature of the colonial state. Although the colonial state was fairly liberal, it was obviously undemocratic (Tunji Olangunju *et al.* 1993). Its national assembly largely represented the interests of the white colonial bourgeoisie. Africans who were the majority lacked the vote. Moreover, for a large part of the colonial period, the interests of the Africans were represented in the Assembly by a member nominated by the governor of a colony.

Given the racial content of the colonial capitalist system and the undemocratic nature of the colonial liberal state, African nationalists began to agitate for political independence. A majority of the nationalist movements were led by Western education elites. Due to their exposure to western liberal democracies, their struggles also adopted a language of liberal values (Anyang' Nyong'o 1993). Generally, Africa nationalists demanded universal adult suffrage, equal representation in national assembly, equal pay for equal work, and equal accessibility to land.

These agitations by the Africans nationalists finally culminated into the granting of political independence by the colonial powers in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the former British colonies, the process leading to full political independence was preceded by constitutional negotiations among various political parties on the one hand, and between these political parties and the colonials office in England on the other. In most cases, a majority of the political parties represented the interests of various ethnic and racial groups. The colonial office on the other hand was more concerned with how the interests of the British would be protected in the post colonies (Oginga Odinga 1971).

The African nationalists who took over the post-colonial state were not a part of the colonial bourgeoisie. A majority of them were members of the middle classes; while others were those who had been politicized through labour movements. As members of the petty-bourgeoisie, their economic base had largely been formal wage or incomes earned from

small businesses. Yet the immediate post colonial state they inherited was a relatively well developed liberal state which upheld a fairly competitive market society. Given the fact that the decolonization process in Africa involved the actual physical exclusion of the colonial bourgeoisie from the affairs of the state, majority of its members decided to sell their properties or transfer their capital outside the region. The massive emmigration of the colonial bourgeoisie created a void within the social content of the immediate post-colonial societies in Africa: now you had a liberal democratic state and a fairly competitive market economy run by a petty-bourgeoisie, but without the physical presence of a national bourgeoisie.

The petty-bourgeoisie by its very nature is a social category without a well defined class interests. In the marxian tradition, the petty-bourgeoisie has the tendency to identify its interests temporary with the bourgeosisie, the proletariat and even the peasants simultaneously. In the case of the immediate post-colonial societies in Africa, the petty-bourgeoisie adopted two options. The first involved identifying with the interests of workers and peasants, and establishing 'socialist states'. The second option was to fill the socio-economic void left behind by the departing colonial bourgeoisie. In both cases, however, the immediate casuality was the multi-party state. In the cases where state socialism was established, the abolition of the multi-party state was justified on the basis of the logic of socialism; whereas in countries where the petty-bourgeoisie saw it fit to fill the vacuum left by the colonial bourgeoisie, their action was justified by various explanations. The explanations ranged from Africanization of the economy to African socialism, whichever way this was defined.

By the mid 1960s, almost all African countries which gained their political independence on the basis of competitive party politics, involving more than one political party, had abandoned the system. In some of these countries, government had been overthrown and replaced by military dictorships. In only a few countries, notably, Senegal, the Gambia and Botswana was multi-party allowed to operate. The collapse of the liberal-democratic state in Africa was accompanied with a general decline of the economic growth in the region. The situation grew worse

during the 1970s and 1980s, leading some African scholars to refer to the period as "the lost decade".

Initially, the countries which adopted the option of replacing the emigrant colonial bourgeoisie with the indigenous petty bourgeoisie, for example, Kenya and Cote d'Ivoire, did relatively better in economic growth than those who opted for socialism. The relative better performance by those countries which opted for mixed economy as opposed to socialism was sometimes alleged to be the result of sabotage of socialist economies by western capitalist countries.

Nevertheless, these kinds of allegations are neither here nor there. What is clear, however, is that a majority of African countries which adopted 'socialism soon after political independence were also the ones whose economies were relatively weaker, for example, Tanzania, and Guinea. In the later years, it actually did not matter whether a country operated a mixed economy or socialist one; almost all of them were managed by a fraction of the African bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie, whose primary interest was to use the state power for purposes of personal capital accumulation.

Admitted, inorder to fill the socio-economic void created by the emigrating colonial bourgeoisie the Africa petty-bourgeoisie resorted to the use of state power for the purposes of personal accumulation; but why did it fail to ensure that the market economy operated efficiently? Moreover, once a small minority of the African national buorgeoissie had been propped-up through the use of state power, why did it fail to liberalize the state, and also made sure that the market society functioned efficiently? Why is the African national buorgeoisie so anti a liberal state and competitive market society, yet these institutions would be to its own interest? In short, is the current African national bourgeoisie capable of fulfilling the mission similar to that of its fore runner -- the European bourgeoisie -- by establishing a liberal democracy in Africa? There are several answers to these questions.

To begin with, there was simply no way in which the petty-bourgeoisie which inherited the post-colonial state could have used the state power to accumulate capital without subverting the efficient

operations of the market. By the very logic of the competitive market society, the petty-bourgeosie who manage the state power could not have accumulated capital rapidly if it had to rely on the strict rules and regulation of the market. Consequently, it resorted to the use of state power to avoid paying taxes and customs duty on imported goods; default in loan repayments, and primitively loot state parastatal organizations.

Secondly, once the original nationalists who inherited state power used it to subvert the efficient operations of the market, they antagonized and alienated the other fractions of the petty-bourgeoisie who due to their in accessibility to the state power could not compete fairly in the market place. It soon became clearer to those who were outside the state power that the only way to accumulate capital was by capturing the state power. The state, therefore, became an arena for contest between various fractions of the bourgeoisie, with each fraction wanting to acquire it for the purposes of capital accumulation.

The problem would have been resolved easily through competitive party politics. Unfortunately, this was not possible because in most of the cases, multi-party politics had already been abandoned. Indeed, the very reason why multi-partyism was abandoned is because the system could have undermined the use of state power by those who inherited it to accumulate personal capital. The only other option left for those who wanted an access to state power was through military coups or organised revolutions.

Thirdly, in order for the fraction who control the state power to consolidate itself, it resorted to the use of ethnic loyalties and patronage. The use of ethnic loyalties and patronage has severely undermined the progressive development of the African national bourgeoisie into a mature social class.

In the marxian tradition, a social class is defined both by its economic content and ideological position. A social class becomes fully developed once it has also acquired a universal class ideological position. In the case of the African national bourgeoisie, it has not acquired this universal class ideological position. That is why the fraction which controls the state power, instead of protecting its counterpart outside the

state appratus against international capital, it literally strives to render it bankrupt. The African national bourgoisie, therefore, has no interest in promoting national capital.

It is safe to say that the African national buorgeisie qualifies as owners of capital and employers of wage labour; but ideologically it has failed to demonstrate that it espouse liberal values. Instead, it is still steeped in ethnic rivalries. As a result, it is anti-liberal democratic values. Given this nature of the African national bourgeosie, the future of liberal democracy in Africa appears to be quite bleak. In short, the objective material conditions and the social context necessary for the successful establishment of a liberal democratic state in Africa is severely lacking.

IV The Projects of transition to multi-party democracy in Africa

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s there have been various attempts to re-introduce multi-party democracies in Africa. The new vision like in the previous period at independence is to transform African societies into liberal democracies. Ironically, these projects have simply illustrated the reactionary nature of the African national bourgeoisie.

Generally, projects for transition to multi-party democracy in Africa may be classified into three categories. The first category are those whereby the incumbent leader gives in to change to multi-party, but retains the role of managing the process, while also participating as a presidential candidate. Examples in this category are Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, and to some extent Nigeria.

The second category are the ones in which the opposition political parties unite with sole aim of removing the incumbent leader from power. Zambia is a good example in this category.

The third category are those whereby the process begins with a national convention constituted by an elected constitutent assembly. The constitutent assembly is convened to re-write a new constitution and appoint an electoral commission to manage the national elections. Examples in this category are Benin, Congo, Mali and Malawi.

Of the three categories of projects for transition to multi-party democracy, the last is the one whereby a majority of incumbent leaders have been successfully removed from office through the electoral process. The second category also has been relatively successful, although the method has not been common. The first category has been the most undemocratic way of trying to implement a transition to democracy. In almost all the cases, the incumbents have managed to remain in power through elections which are characterised by obvious irregularities. But whatever the strengths and weaknesses of each method, there are some general characteristics which are shared by all projects for transition to democracy.

To begin with, a number of political parties which emerged during the run-up to multi-party elections lacked serious ideological positions. Their financial infrastructure were also seriously weak. Due to these weaknesses they ended up being identified with personalities rather than programmes. The file and rank of their key officials turned out to be opportunists of yester years. They lacked commitment, direction and vision; they could not explain genuinely why they were opposing the incumbent (Tunji Olagunju, 1993, 210; Gyimah-Boadi 1994,82).

Secondly, most of the opposition parties which emerged had predominantly ethnic support. The politics of ethnicity which emerged quite prominently during the run-up to multi-party election may be explained by a number of factors. One, it may be the result of a lack of clear ideological position of the political parties themselves which encouraged ethnicity. Two, it may be that the petty-bourgeoisie and national burgeoisie who led these political parties encouraged ethnicity for the purposes of mobilizing support. Three, it could well be that nationalities living within the countries of Africa's nation -- states do not regard themselves as constituting a nation with other nationalities. Whatever the explanation, the thrust of ethnicity into Africa's political anatomy is a clear indication that issue of ethnicity can nolonger be dismissed as a misguided slogan of the reactionery elements of our societies (Tunji Olagunju et al. 1993, 210 -11; Daily Nation, May 19, 1994; June 30 & 31, 1994).

Thirdly, the entire multi-party political process has been characterized by too much noises rather than sober and constructive debates. Since the completion of national elections, no serious attempts have been made by both the government and opposition to give the nations a vision. It is as if the petty-bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie running the show cannot identify a single interest which can unify them as social classes. Soon the ordinary electorate will start wondering when multi-partiyism will come to an end.

Fourthly, there is a school of thought which argues that in order for opposition political parties to become stronger and challenge the government, they should unite (Lemarchand 1992, 99). This argument runs against the very logic of liberal democracy. If the main purpose of liberalizing and democratizing the state is to create conditions for accountability and transparency, then what purpose will be served by uniting opposition political parties. Those arguing for the unification of the opposition want to ignore the ideological bankruptcy of the opposition political parties. A liberal democratic state is a market for political goods. If a political party wants to sell its political goods, it must demonstrate that its goods are superior to those of other political parties. In the final analysis therefore, it is not the number of political parties in the political market place, rather it is the kind of programmes and vision they sell to the electorate that determines their growth and survival.

Finally, there is no doubt that without the additional pressure from the international community these projects for transition to multi-party democracy could not have come this far. The national bourgeoisie must understand that it is not every day that the interest of international capital converge with those of national capital. The two forms of capital are often opposed to one another. Those agitating for change in Africa cannot continue to rely on foreign support. Opposition political parties in Africa must learn to build support from within, because in the final analysis any viable democracy in Africa must be home grown.

V Towards a realistic democratic formular in Africa

All this is not intended to mean that a democratic form of governance is impossible in Africa. On the contrary all that is being said is

that it is futile to blindly assume that a liberal democratic state is viable in the region, even when it can be scientifically demonstrated that the objective material conditions necessary for that form of governance is lacking. At the beginning of this article I indicated that according to the classical origin of the concept, democracy simply means 'rule by the people'. The immediate problem is with the phrase"the people". Who constitute 'the people' in a democracy?

In the liberal tradition, especially in John Locke and Jean Jacque Ronsseau, the beginning of a body politic is the establishment of a covenant through a social contract. Such a social contract is entered into by the people interested in creating a body politic, and between the people and their governments. In the United States of America, this event was literally performed by the Pilgrim Fathers on the *Mayflower* in 1620 (Ronsseau 1950).

According to the liberal philosophy, the reason people enter into a social contract among themselves and with their rulers is because every man is born independent, free and equal. As such no man has the right to subject another to a political power without consent (Locke 1966, 49).

Furthermore, by the very logic of the natural freedom, equality and independence inherent in man, a people who enter into a covenant is sovereign. When a people surrender some of its powers to the rulers it does not loose its sovereignity. It merely surrender some of its powers to its rulers temporarily so that the rulers may use those powers to uphold the general will or common good for each and every member of the covenant.

In short, democracy is about power relations; it is about making sure that the people have power over those who govern them. The task in Africa, therefore, is to design a system which can enable people to make their rulers accountable to them. Liberal democracy is just one such system. If in our case, liberal democracy cannot guarantee us this fundamental requirement for a democracy, especially when we are also convinced that the system is unlikely to be sustained in the region, then there is no need insisting on it.

From that brief account of the liberal theory of democracy, it becomes clearer that in Africa, the immediate problem is that of the national question. For example, who defined African nation-states? Did the African who constitute these nation-states give his consent for their creation? What are the fundamental interests of the various nationalities and races which inhabit these nation-states? Have these interests been genuinely consulted any time whenever constitutions are written and states defined? What methods have been used to consult such interests? What are the objective material conditions of the African body politic?

In an attempt to explain how imperialism can be overthrown in Africa, Dan Nabudere once suggested that the first step would be to deal with the national question (Nabudere 1978, 276). Nabudere was concerned with how the overthrow of imperialism could lead to a successful establishment of socialism in Africa. In my view that is far fetched. In my case, I am concerned with how genuine democracies can be established. My starting point, however, is like Nabudere, the national question.

The first question we need to ask is what is the dominant factor in African politics? Without doubt, in Africa ethnicity has emerged as the dominant factor in politics. As we have noted, during the on-going national elections, the voting pattern assumed an ethnic character. The ethnic character of African politics may be explained by the failure of the national bourgeoisie to acquire a universal class ideology. Alternatively, it may be the result of the natural development of national identities. Whatever the explanations, the fact is that ethnicity is the dominant factor.

To deal with the national question, therefore, means dealing with the ethnic question. It has been fashionable for some elements of the African elite to deny the dominant role of ethnicity in African politics. The irony is that while mobilising supporters for political office, the same elite is ready to use the ethnic ideology; but once they have achieved they goals, the condem ethnicity. This kind of opportunism is unrealistic. There is nothing terribly wrong with identifying the interests and fears of various ethnic groups within African nation-states, and dealing with them accordingly.

In my view the more realistic national convention should be multi-ethnic conventions within each nation-state. Since not all members of an ethnic group can attend such a convention, equal number of representation from each group could be chosen to represent the interest of each ethnic group. The method to be used in choosing the representatives would be left at the discretion of each ethnic group.

At the conventions, the issues to be discussed should include subjects such as whether the ethnic group wish to remain a part of the current nation-state; the fundamental interests and fears of each ethnic group; the kind of state each ethnic group need; what powers each ethnic group would be willing to surrender to the state; and the nature of economy each ethnic group wish to establish.

It is at the multi-ethnic convention that a constitutional arrangement could be worked out and an acceptable kind of state defined. There would definitely be nothing wrong if the ethnic groups agree on a form of ethnic federalism based on grass-root democracy. Such arrangements have been worked out in Europe; and have enabled some of the European countries to evolve and sustain viable democracies. This in my view is the more realistic way of approaching the national question for the purposes of establishing genuine democracies in Africa.

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