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DEMOCRACY



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DEMOCRACY AND THE EMERGENT PRESENT IN AFRICA:
INTERROGATING THE HISTORICAL ASSUMPTIONS

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DEMOCRACY AND THE EMERGENT PRESENT IN AFRICA: INTERROGATING THE HISTORICAL ASSUMPTIONS

By Atieno Odhaimbo

A. Totalizing Discourses

Discourses on democracy in Africa have scripted a continent turned upside down in a mere three years between 1989 and 1992. Richard Dowden has written:

> "Only a few years ago for an outsider to suggest that multi-party democracy would be good for Africa was to risk being labelled neo-colonialist. There was a consensus that Africa was different and was developing its own forms of Democracy, more suited to its history and culture". [Dowden, 1993; 607]

This interest in the re-democratisation in Africa has taken place at a time when Mikhail Gorbachev and his successors have been unscrambling the world that Joseph Stalin built. This internal collapse was celebrated by the US State Department as the End of History through one of its essayists, Francis Fukuyama. The essay immediately attracted a lot of attention "because it seemed to provide the ideological foundation for a new round of US hegemony, the ideological gloss for a new American assertiveness" [Pieterse; 1992; 9]. The author's pedigree was impeccable in terms of his association with state power. "We may interpret Fukuyama as a mandarin in Chomsky's sense, as intellectual of the state, with intellectual pretensions and closer to the national security state that to a particular administration" Pieterse added. Fukuyama held up the USA as a beacon of liberal freedom to be emulated by all post-Cold War world. But this was no new posture:

> " Upholding the US as an example to the world is a motif as old as the Pilgrim Fathers. 'Manifest Destiny' served this purpose since the nineteenth century. In the 1950s during the US 'rise to globalism' liberal democracy was held out as America's guiding light, institutionalised as part of American foreign policy and theorized as part of modernisation theory. Now... it is dusted off and reinstated... In this light Fukuyama's argument is a perfectly conventional restatement of America's foreign policy orthodoxy" [Pieterse, 1992; 11].

The teleology of Fukuyama's thesis celebrates the triumph of liberal democracy. Disaggregating this incantation is called for. First, liberalism. "In nineteenth-century Europe, liberalism and colonialism developed alongside each other" writes Bikhu Parekh. "With rare exceptions, liberals approves of colonialism and provided it with a legitimising ideology" [Parekh, 1994; 11]. At the hands of J. S. Mill, the notion became Europeanised and universalised. Only Europeans had attained the level of possessive individualism. They were thus civilised, and had a mission to spread this notion. Colonialism provided the opportunity through which China, India, and Africa - the latter a "continent without history" in Mill's words - could be

uplifted. As is known, Karl Marx shared these sentiments with regard to the French colonization of Algeria and the British conquest of India. Parekh continues: "Within the colonial context, the Millan liberal is thus subject to two conflicting demands. He justifies colonialism on the grounds that backward societies need to be civilised and that only Europeans can do this. He must therefore argue both that the liberal principals are universally valid and that they are uniquely European in their origin and inspiration". For the late twentieth century substitute the West for Europe and Fukuyama for Mill and the End of History thesis fits the mould. There is a further irony in this: the Reaganite-Bush axis have had but contempt for liberalism, their byte-word for Democratic Party people-oriented policies during the past two decades. How come that what is contemptible at home can be celebrated abroad?

But to return to Fukuyama. Given the centrality of the USA in his thesis, the rhetorical question has been asked: Can the USA promote democracy? According to Samuel P. Huntington as summarised by Allison and Beschel the USA could contribute to democratic development in several ways: "assisting economic development of poor countries; encouraging developing countries to foster market economies and development of rigorous bourgeois classes; refurbishing the United States own economic, military, and political power so as to exercise greater influence than it has in world affairs; and developing 'a concerted programme designed to encourage and to help the elites of countries entering the "transition zone" to lead their countries in a more democratic direction' " [Allison and Beschel, 1992; 86].

For one more familiar with the hegemonic rhetoric of the West, including those harbingers of the Third Colonial Occupation of Africa, the World Bank and the IMF, the 'market economies', 'bourgeois classes', for Africa and USA 'exercising greater influence' have a familiar imperialist ring. At any rate the two Harvard professors advocate that the USA should continue on an activist interventionist trajectory by outlining a series of "DO'S" for their country:

> " DO make American democracy a 'shining city on a hill'. Western democracies must never forget that in the final analysis it is the vitality of their values, institutions and societies that will be the strongest argument for democracy.
>
> DO speed the transfer of the technological infrastructure of pluralism to newly democratic and nondemocratic societies: printing presses, photocopiers, personal computers, fax machines, satellite dishes, and modern telecommunications systems.
>
> DO encourage the development of independent, civilian analysis of military issues throughout newly democratic and democratising countries.
>
> DO encourage the development of independent universities and research institutions to assume the responsibility of educating the next generation in a timely fashion" [Allison and Beschel, 1992; 90-97].

B. The Nationalist Moment

The assumption of this conference is that the discipline of History in Africa has so far not spoken to the 'global' agenda of democratisation. Implicit in the invitation is the need for the re-interrogation of African History, a production of an African past that may be usable in the present and the many possible futures. The central actor in this enterprise is presumed to be the African historian, himself largely a product of the decolonisation process [Vansina, 1992; Fage, 1993]. The evolution of the discipline and the making of the African historian have to be seen as twin births. As recounted by one of the founders:

> "African history was really born on a specific date and its parent was Prof. Phillips, then heading the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), in London" [Vansina 1992; 77]

The African historians of the first generation arrived academically with the doctorate and appointment of K.O. Dike to faculty status in 1954. As noted by Mudimbe and Jewsciewicki this moment of arrival was simultaneously academic as well as political [Jewsciewicki and Mudimbe, 1994]. For the generation of B.A. Ogot and J.F.A. Ajayi the 1950s and 1960s were the years of 'reintroducing the African man to the world' [Ogot, 1967]. The continent had hitherto been wilfully excluded from Judeo-Christian historicity by western slavery and colonialism which had established that Africans were people without history. The process of the reintroduction thus involved the negation of this Hegelian negation. It led Cheikh Anta Diop to stake claims to the ancient Egyptian civilisations on behalf of black people globally. Likewise it embodied B.A. Ogot to assert the anterior validity of oral traditions as a source for African History, indeed as the foundation resource for English history: Holinshed and his predecessors had first utilised the domain of Orality [Odhiambo, 1979]. The political moment of African independence also called for the eclectic assertion of a glorious past: Africa had always had empires and kingdoms, and even the clan-based societies and moieties - The Tribes Without Rulers of yore - had always had good government. An ordered past was thus asserted. A glorious political future was promissory: "Seek ye first the political Kingdom and all else will be added unto you" Nkrumah allured. What remained, to be explained away, was the colonial moment which Ajayi readily bracketed to have been merely an episode in the long march in African history [Ajayi, 1965]. In a recent clarification Ajayi has asserted that the emphasis of his justly famous article was "on continuity and identity in Africa, not the brevity or seeming impact of colonialism". The author continues:

> "I still believe in the continuity of Africa identity, but I now emphasise that although slavery and colonialism do not constitute the total definition of that identity, they have made an impact on it to the extent of affecting the capacity of the African for autonomous developments" [Ajayi, 1994:28].

Ajayi makes a further pertinent point with these words:

> "While initially African scholars were able to play a leading role, the elaboration of the new historiography has

> been not only a multi-disciplinary project but also an international one. The leadership of African scholars in this historiography has not even remained assured...As in the whole national movement itself, the educated elite stand facing both ways" [Ajayi 1994:27].

In the context of this paper, the African historian is not likely to bring fresh illuminations into discussion about democracy, because his primary concerns have largely with the reassertion of our global humanity, and secondly with the articulation of the usefulness of the historical past for the state hegemonic project. To the latter now we turn.

The African historian of the 1960s was the intellectual nationalist of the new state. The need for a history for the state was taken as axiomatic. The relevance of history was equally unproblematic: History was a resource to be used for nation-building [Oloruntimhin, 1967] and for development [Were, 1983]. As Dirks has noted, "History has played a key role in the modern production of the nation-state and of the various bases of nationality, at the same time that the nation has played a critical historical role in defining what a modern conception of history should be" [Dirks, 1990:25]. In Africa decolonisation has mandated the crafting of state histories: **A History of Nigeria** [Isichei], **A Modern History of Tanganyika** [Iliffe], **A History of Sierra Leone** [Magbaily-Fyle], **A Modern History of Kenya** [Ochieng]. Each of these states had to be given a nationalist history of its precolonial past and of its freedom struggles. Dirks continues, "The master narratives of nineteenth-century history have been appropriated by the subjects of colonial rule". Along this vein, he observes, "History has therefore been deeply implicated both in hegemony and struggle". The Mau Mau debates continually raging in Kenya testify to the fact of nationalist history as constituting the site for struggles over the many pasts of the Kenya state [Odhiambo, 1992]. However the overall continental picture is a lot more benign. After three decades we have ended with a discipline, African History, that is still an annex of western historiography, "whiggish stories of national self-determination and the unfolding of freedom" [Dirks, 1990]. In reviewing these efforts Jewsciewicki and Mudimbe have written: "For years African historiography has been more sensitive to the politics of Western academia than to the social and political challenges faced by African societies" [1994:4]. They go further to argue that African historians have been doing an uncritical paste-job of linking a 'glorious past' to a 'radiant future'. What has suffered is the history of the present, 'the myriad ancient paths connecting the past to the present'. In the quest to be western-scientific African historians have eliminated those cultural peculiarities that would have made our indigenous narratives truly autochthonic and not a sanitised version of the Judeo-Christian western- universal. African historians have tended to eliminate "magic, mythologies and the supposedly irrational" from the gaze of history. The "cultural framework of the present" has not been explicated in African terms. The situation should tease contemporary historians to imagine the possibilities of an African past unmediated by the midwifery of western modernity.

C. AFRICAN KNOWLEDGE: AJALA'S HEADS

A recent historiographical essay by John Fage ends on this salutary note:

> "In the last analysis, it does need to be asked whether European concepts of history are suitable for the understanding of African history...It is possible, indeed, to believe that the idea of history as we have come to know it in modern Europe was not one to precolonial African society" [Fage, 1993:24].

In the context of the concerns of this conference, the questions raised via the statements by Fage need to be foregrounded. Has the time come to question our unitary acceptance of the hegemonic episteme which posits that the discipline of history uniquely belongs to western civilisation? Alternatively, can Africans articulate an African gnosis that stands independently of these western traditions in our study in African history? Need African epistemes be intelligible to the West? Need the study and practice of African history be tied to the guild of historical study at the university academies? Is there still the lingering possibility that any one of us working within the western mode can have the arterial intellectual bypass surgery that may still be the viaduct upstream to the African reservoir of history? Prof. Fage does not believe so.

"For the moment we have very little African history written by Africans who are untainted by European conceptions and the significances of their own past," he writes. {In an intriguing footnote to this statement Fage adds: "The example that immediately comes to mind is the fascinating chapter, "The Living Tradition" by A. Hampate Ba, **UNESCO General History of Africa**. [Berkeley, 1981:1 166-203]. (But maybe Hampate Ba was more resistant to European culture than untainted by it)}. The fact of this inescapable route of our professional training via the colonial archive has been noted by philosophers working on African material [Mudimbe 1988, 1992, Appiah 1992); indeed the mastery of this western canon has been seen as constituting the intellectual lifeline and survival kit of the Franco-African scholar-philosopher Pauline Hountondji (D.B. Cruise O'Brian, 1991) among others.

To home in, a series of questions relating to the discipline of history are in order. What was the common African experience of history? What common ideas of African history did the Ekiti of the Nineteenth century (before the Christian Missionaries made Yorubas of them) share with their presumed Somaali cousins of that era? What notions of power, authority, domination - and also of democracy, participation, accountability and civil society - did they share? From what common cultural universe were they trapped? Could a post-Mfecane Sotho recognise Ajala's Heads as a part of his cultural repertoire, imbued with the same meaning? What are our ways of knowing all this, as historians?

And which historians? John Fage, cited above, teases us to think of the possibility of its being markedly different from that of the western construct. Even in name, the titles of the Journals publishing African history articles signal us to the problematic

of translation. Is Europe's word History (ME < L *historia* < Gr. learning by inquiry, narrative < *history*, knowing, learned < base of *eidenai*, to know < IE Base* *weis* -, to see, know > wise) to be translated as Hadith, Ngano,Kale Odu, Zamani, Mohlomi, as has been the uncritical practice? Supposing there was no such equivalents, no such meanings? A salutary parallel inquiry by Louis Brenner alerts us to the complexity of this whole terrain:

> "How do we analyse 'religion' in a society in which the concept of 'religion' is absent? This question arises because in the past most African languages did not include a word which could be convincingly and unequivocally translated as 'religion'. Such words exist now: New usages which have been adopted and adapted under the influence of Christianity or Islam: and of course, under the influence of academic or theological discourse. But Historically within Africa, those institutional and conceptual distinctions which contemporary scholars might describe as religious, political, economic or social, do not seem to have existed. Nonetheless, most studies of African societies treat 'religion' as an institutionally and conceptually distinct category of analysis as if the author knew precisely what it was, not only for himself, but for the members of the societies under study as well. The result has been that, consciously or not, external concepts have come to define 'religion' in Africa.
>
> The problem is not located so much in the process of conceptualisation; after all, analysis requires a range of clear concepts. The problem arises in distinguishing which concepts properly belong to the analysis itself and which to the object of analysis" (Brenner, 1989: 87)

Put in stark terms, how does one move from 'Yoruba' to 'Africa'? What latitudes are to be permitted in this quantum and eclectic leap? Professor Akinjogbin elided the issue in his inaugural address by entering a special plea:

> "What then did African think about history and its uses? Because we have not yet arrived at a stage where the philosophies of history as propounded by all African societies can be meaningfully discussed, I shall attempt to answer this question by taking my example of thoughts on history among Africans from the Yoruba speaking peoples, who have been my special area of study for the last twenty years. When we remember that the Yoruba and their related peoples are to be found, as indigenous populations and in large and influential numbers in four modern West African states, then it will be realised that they constitute a very important portion of Africans inhabiting the West African forest region, and that a study of their thoughts on history pervades a large portion of the African continent" (Akinjogbin, 1977: 9).

This is indeed a calculated move, a plea for permission to generalise from the particular specifics of Yoruba experience. The Yoruba have a category of knowledge, *itan* knowledge derived from human actions or from actions which human eyes can observe, including all the applied sciences, are classified as History (*Itan*) (1977:10).

"*Itan* for the Yoruba included what we should now regard as Law, Political Science, Philosophy, Literature...The Yoruba believe that...a good acquaintance with history bestows ogbon...roughly translated as wisdom".

Thus forewarned, the argument for the Yoruba view of history was then more encompassingly stated:

"Let us look a little bit more closely at how Yoruba viewed history. For the Yoruba, *Itan* is anything observed and remembered about the actions, voluntary and involuntary, of human beings as well as of his natural environments. Thus itan, history, is not just a record of human actions, not just as human beings do. The development of all living objects constitutes history for the Yoruba mind as long as such a development is remembered by human beings. Thus when the Yoruba say "*igi ti o ba ti oju eni hu, ko le wo pa ni*" (a tree that grew under one's observation, cannot crush one), they are not denying that the volume or mass or weight of such a tree could be lethal if it fell on one. Rather they are saying that the tree has a history which will be so well known, that one will be able to take precautions against its eventual fall. Or when the Yoruba say "*a kii mo oruko iku, ki iku o pa 'ni, a kii mo oruko arun ki aun so ni lojo*" (if one knows the name of death, death does not kill one prematurely, and if one knows the name of disease, it does not confine one) they are saying that death and diseases have their histories which, once known, aid prevention and cure. In other words, inanimate things like trees and diseases also have their histories which, when remembered by human beings, lend them to easier manipulation. This definition of history by the Yoruba is very wide, but it will be agreed that it is very modern, for current approaches to the study of natural phenomena to be harnessed for human use are tending to be historical. Modern scientists are seeking to know the histories and characteristics of these phenomena in order to be able to manipulate them".

The argument further proceeds:

"Not only have the Yoruba defined history they have also have thought about the nature of history. From the example of the Ifa verse...one would gain the impression that the Yoruba believed that history repeats itself...In other words Ifa tends to show that the same events repeat themselves and can serve as guide to solutions of present problems.

Similar to this view of history is the Yoruba saying '*Aiye nre ibi aaro*' (the world is going back to the morning period). Here history is seen in terms of the natural phenomena of day with its morning, afternoon and evening or night periods. This looks like the cyclical view of history...There is however another saying which shows that the Yoruba also saw history as continuous. '*Aiye nlo a nto o*' [The world is moving and we are following]...there is the implication here that history is continuous, very similar to Arnold Toynbee's view of history being a seamless

garment...These examples should caution us against thinking that the Yoruba had a monolithic view of the nature of history.

Just as the Yoruba had thought about the nature of history, so they had also pondered upon its uses. Foremost among the advantages which the study of history was believed to confer is *ogbon* [wisdom]. We commonly hear people say that the only lesson of history is that nobody learns from history. This is a view the Yoruba did not accept. To them a person who did not or could not learn from history was, not just an *ego* [fool] but an *omugo* [ie. someone who makes foolishness his constant drink]. To show how highly the Yoruba regarded knowledge of history, Orunmila the epitome of knowledge and wisdom in Yoruba cosmology, is called *epitan ale Ife* [the historian of Ife land]. The implication here is that Orunmila's wisdom is derived at least in part from his knowledge of history" [Akinjogbin, 1977: 11-12].

Prof. Akinjogbin's theses justly deserve extensive quotation because they are definitive and prescriptive: they define history as part of knowledge and its usage as being the pursuit of wisdom from which may be derived an appropriate present. They also expose the very wide distance between western history and the Yoruba concept of reality. They also alert us to the possibility that the Yoruba may not necessarily inhabit the same universe of reality as their equally robust nemesis, the Luo of the river-lake regions of eastern Africa. On the other hand they may. The point is that one must not just glide from Ife to Pubungu, the respective cradlelands of the Yoruba and Luo. Nor from either simply to Africa. The totalizing extrapolation skips over a necessary middle. There is a need for surveillance lest we unwittingly perpetuate the hegemonic myth of African sameness.

The above discussion foregrounds the problems inherent in making continental inferences from regional visibilities. Condensation can also lead to aggregation. The most visible of such hegemonic enterprises lately has been **The UNESCO General History of Africa** project, of which Vansina has written:

"With regard to African History, to my mind at least, GHA has been the most impressive venture of this century, not only because of its size or complexity, but because it involved authors from the most diverse origins and belonging to all the schools of thought then active in international academic circles" [Vansina, 1993: 350].

This global project itself invites surveillance in the context of the conference agenda. The language of discourse about power and authority, control and domination, conquest and rule, dissent and suppression, rebellion and destruction or flight, resonates throughout the volumes covering the Africa of pre-colonial times. One can hardly squeeze out democracy, human rights, personal freedom, transparency and accountability out of these volumes. They are in reality about imperial, kingly, priestly and military prowess. The chapters do not unveil the politics of participation between kings and commoners, between the Sarautas and the Takalawas, between the *Wangwana* and the *Washenzi* of Mombasa. Where does one begin to search for democratic traits in this

narrative of the victors and the vanquished?

D. THE IMAGINED PAST

One way of reading *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is to interpret it as representation: a presentation of a possible past and a performance of the idiom of political democracy in Umuofia. It is possible then to read uniformity in Umuofia, Mbaino and Mbanta although the author insists on diversity as the typical characteristic. One such reading offers this celebration:

> "What is remarkable about the Igbos is the degree to which they have achieved the foundations of what most people seek today - democratic institutions, tolerance of other cultures, a balance between male and female principles, capacity to change for the better or to meet new circumstances, a means of redistributing wealth, support for industriousness, a viable system of morality, an effective system of justice...Achebe appears to have tested Igbo culture against the goals of modern liberal democracy and to have set out to show how the Igbo met those standards" [Rhoads, 1993: 61].

This reading resonates well with the colonial archive which duly noted and canonized the notion of Igbo receptivity to change. It also delineates and reaffirms the Protestant Ethic that was seemingly inherent in Okonkwo [but not in his father Unoko]. Rhoads further argues: "Achebe emphasises certain basic political institutions which might form the foundation of a modern African state. Igbo gerontocracy provided the encompassing umbrella.

> "For great decisions the *ndichie*, or elders gather together all of Umuofia...The clan rules all, and the collective will of the clan can be established only by the group. Further, as is appropriate for and in a democracy, each amn is judged on his own merits, 'according to his worth', not those of his father, as would be appropriate in an aristocracy or an oligarchy" [Rhoads, 1993: 63].

The lineage of this discourse is distinctly modern: JJ Rousseau and JS Mill would recognize the simulcrum of democracy in early twentieth-century Umuofia with utmost ease. Yet the nagging question still has to be: how could one remodel the contemporary scene in Anambra or Imo state, or more ambitiously all of chaotic Nigeria from one Umuofia writ large? In what ways would the Igbo world of the novelist Acebe become the precursor for the post-colonial state, beyond the current aphoristic prism for seeing states and nations as imagined communities?

There is an alternative view of village societies that regards them as no less restrictive than aristocracies or oligarchies. Summarising a large body of literature Gellner has stated as follows:

> "...agrarian man has the option of being dominated either by kings or by cousins...The system of social positions to which he is so closely tied will generally use kin terminology, and social units will consist of real or fictive kinsmen. So very roughly, the price of being able to resist kings is to be tied very firmly to cousins. You can escape one or the other, but not both, though you can of course be yoked to both. In fact, the typical agrarian polity does combine these elements" [Gellner, 1991: 500].

Gellner adds that modern man, in desiring civil society, wishes to be free of tyrannical state rule "but not at the cost of falling into the hands of the cousins" whose sole wish is indeed to impose an 'incessant anthropology' [Cohen and Odhiambo, 1989: 54; 1992: 66-67] of demands, obligations and extraction on their petty-bourgeois and bourgeois kin. An equalitarian, communocratic village democracy must be part of that idyllic past politically constructed by the likes of Julius Nyerere in the 1960s the more to control and extract taxes and tribute from African peasantries.

But the assumption that there is some residual democracy that can be salvaged from African 'traditions' dies hard. Maxwell Owusu has most recently argued that there is a 'vibrant' strand in African political traditions directly relevant to democratisation,

> "...namely the set of 'leadership norms' often enshrined in oaths, song and drum texts, maxims and proverbs, prayers and ceremonies, which gave shape to the rival 'principle of equality' or equal potentiality to authority ['the king in every man'] constituting what I have referred to as fiduciary obligation of trusteeship, subordinating the wielders of political power to 'constitutional law' and checks and balances. These principles conversely established the 'right' and duty of the subjects to disobey and even kill an autocratic tyrannical ruler" [Owusu, 1994: 32-33].

Owusu's advocacy relies on the fact that Akan chieftaincies and close-knit family systems have enabled the citizens of Ghana to weather the caprices of the recurrent military dictatorships over the last three decades. Yet the problem lies precisely here: how does one transfer these village-democratic values above the heads of Jerry Rawlings and the cheeky Chikata brothers to establish and routinize them at the centre of state power? Why have these values not restrained the military? Indeed how come that Rawlings and the bandit-President Yoweri Museveni have lasted so long amidst the historic Akan and Kitara complexes?

Part of the answer lies in an alternative tradition of power that has flourished directly out of the right to rebellion that Owusu applauds. Elsewhere I have argued that the right to kill the king and seize the throne - the Kyebambe tradition - has itself become a permanent fixture in the eastern African kingdoms:

> "Between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries the successor states to Kitara invented the Kyebambe Tradition: the right to revolt and kill the reigning monarch, and proclaim oneself as his rightful successor through the vanquishing of the dead king's followers. The Kyebambe tradition remains Uganda's most durable tradition...The pursuit of power for its own sake has brought into practice the Kyebambe tradition, a whole line of personalities and names, with titles for themselves and kingdoms on the march, traversing the terrain..." [Odhiambo, 1989: 12,17].

Botswana has lately been flaunted by the experts as the one exception that proves the rule of continuity and change and a veritable model for the workings of a modernized and democratic polity. Thus one author states:

> "Botswana is the only African country that has managed to transform its colonial heritage into a viable democracy

without first passing through a period of authoritarian rule, mainly as the result of wise political leadership and a large measure of good fortune. The Batswana proceeded modestly and prudently, blending the traditional and the modern in a pragmatic way. Although the Tswana chiefs play a very secondary role in the central regime, they remain respected and influential at the local level. They continue to dispense justice and arbitrate civil disputes in their traditional courts...They operate in tandem with elected district councils, which are responsible for local government activities..." [Landell-Mills, 1992:544].

Our critique of this fascination with Botswana is specific: the institutions herein described are not the Tswana traditions of the 1830s, but very much colonial social apparatuses. Secondly the discourses are loud on chiefly authority but muted on the questions of people's participation and liberal democracy. Thirdly the premises for this Tswana success are rather capricious. In Landell-Mill's words the success has been "mainly as the result of good leadership and a large measure of good fortune". These are precisely the variables that have proved volatile continentally, that need to be programmatized and domesticated. They do not at any event rise out of the well-springs of the ordinary lived-in experiences, and cannot be replicated as such. THAT THE TSWANA ARE ALMOST THERE BECAUSE THEY ARE LUCKY cannot be a necessary and sufficient lesson of history.

E. THE FUTURE PRESENT AND THE ABUSES OF THE PAST

The most agonizing historical conjuncture obtains today in AZANIA, particularly in KwaZulu where history of a certain African type is being played up and out as if to underscore its banal relevance and persistent perversity. The Zulu nationalist Mangosuthu Buthelezi has in the past two decades made his versions of the Zulu past the centrepieces for his struggles for the present and the future. In a recent article Patrich Harries outlines the dimensions of these tragic usages of the past [Harries 1993]. Harries depicts the nature of Zulu identity in the Nineteenth Century as having been based on a set of cultural markers defined by the royal family. Following the destruction of the Zulu Kingdom, there arose a generation of Zulu modernizers who utilized identity as a resource for negotiating and establishing a niche as a petty-bourgeoisie in the emergent industrial world of the 1920s and 1930s. These mission educated 'new men' rallied around the Zulu language, which served as a bridge linking them to the emergent proletariat and the landless masses. They also fell back on the imagery of the Zulu king. Harries writes:

"The Zulu king was perceived as a crucial symbol, linking the people north and south of the Tugela in a new, yet historical, Zulu community. By portraying the king and the Zulu language as traditional symbols that bound Zulu-speakers within a new and expanded political space, the petty-bourgeoisie was able to unite the disparate communities into the most powerful ethnic alliance in South Africa. At the grassroots level this new concept of the tribe provided people, uprooted and disorientated by colonialism, with a means of reasserting patriarchal and tribal controls...What is equally clear is that while Zulu symbolism was traditional, its content was decidedly modern. By

looking at the imagery of the old kingdom the petty-bourgeoisie sought to unite traditionalists and modernizers; to reinforce the space that they had defined, they encouraged a belief in a shared past" [Harries, 1993:112].

The apartheid regime facilitated this new 'tribalism' by providing it with a homeground in a Bantustan, Kwaszulu, in 1970. From this fastness Buthelezi has been speaking of history, of a history that is meticulous in its appropriation of the western canon:

> "One of the ways in which he has mobilized a regional support base has been through his recourse to the legitimising power of history and tradition. Buthelezi expresses a strong admiration for the didactic and ocular virtues of Kleio. He has a developed sense of history and in his public speeches he has made reference to virtually every major historian who has written on the Zulu. It is not unusual for him to quote an entire dispatch buries in the London P.R.O., an extract of a nineteenth-century newspaper, or a modern doctoral thesis. He views history as a tool for understanding the present and peppers his speeches with 'I have learnt from history', 'as a historian', and 'we must learn the lesson of history'. In his speeches history takes on a life and dynamism of its own as it 'demands', 'lends', 'decrees', 'forges', 'infuses', 'shapes', 'creates', 'screams', 'shows', 'makes', and particularly 'teaches'. Buthelezi draws numerous parallels between past and present events" [Harries, 1993: 114].

What that history to inculcate among other things is the parallel between the 19th century Shaka state and the present Inkatha state; the direct linkage between imperial conquest and nation-building then and now. It also appropriates the wider nationalist and teleological view of the state embraced by the Africanist historians of the 1960s. This line legitimises the Buthelezi project: African heroism, valour and capacity for state-building was the stuff from which national histories have been written in the past three decades. The hegemonic project of Gatsha Buthelezi affirms the possibilities of using and abusing the past in agrarious ways.

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PATRICK HARRIES, Imagery, Symbolism, and Tradition in a South African Bantustan: Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Inkatha, and Zulu History ..... 105 – 122

(In Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe eds)
History Making in Africa