REVIEW ESSAYS

Understanding the "Third Wave" of Democratization in Africa

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The unfolding of what Samuel P. Huntington has called the "third wave" of democratization within the international system (the first two waves began in the 1820s and the 1940s) has led to an outpouring of scholarship within the discipline of political science, particularly among regional specialists. In the case of the subfield of African studies, scholarly analyses of the democratization process—often referred to as Africa's "springtime" or "second independence"—dramatically increased at the end of the decade of the 1980s. This scholarship was sparked by the convergence of a variety of trends both internal and external to the African continent: the end of the Cold War and the downfall of single-party communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which in turn significantly discredited the existence of single-party (especially Marxist) political systems throughout Africa; severe economic stagnation and the so-called "crisis" of the African state which facilitated the widespread adoption of "structural adjustment programs" largely designed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank; and, finally, and perhaps most important, the rise of increasingly organized and vocal pressure groups within African "civil societies" that sought the liberalization of their respective political and economic systems.

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This period of democratization has fostered both optimism and pessimism among Africanists. Optimism was particularly generated by a host of early successes, most notably the convening of a “national conference” in Benin during 1990 that led to the peaceful transfer of power from the Marxist dictatorship of President Kerekou to a multiparty democracy. Pessimism increasingly has been generated by the simple reality that, beginning in 1992, the democratization process in Africa significantly stalled and, in extreme cases such as Rwanda and Somalia, degenerated into violent ethnic conflict and the collapse of the state. According to Claude Ake, the director of the Center for Advanced Social Science Research at Port Harcourt, Nigeria, what one is witnessing in even the so-called “success stories” of Africa (e.g., Zambia) can be characterized as the “democratization of disempowerment”—a process whereby newly installed multiparty systems merely allow rotating and competing portions of ruling elites to exploit the vast majority of Africa’s largely rural populations, who continue to remain disempowered from their respective political systems.

Regardless of whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, very few (if any) Africanists reject the normative value of a democratization process that replaces economically stagnant, authoritarian, single-party systems with more economically vibrant, democratic forms of governance. In this regard, the terms of the debate have shifted away from such Cold War—inspired questions as whether Marxism is favorable to capitalism, or whether single-party regimes can promote the welfare of their respective peoples, to how best facilitate and institutionalize the liberalization of African economies and political systems.

The volume edited by Thomas M. Callaghy and John Ravenhill, Hemmed In: Responses to Africa’s Economic Decline, comprises original essays written by 13 leading Africanists within the disciplines of economics and political science, and provides an excellent starting point for understanding the political and especially the economic dimensions of change in Africa during the 1980s and the 1990s. The authors argue that reform-minded African leaders and external supporters of change must adopt a “realistic, hardheaded analysis of African conditions” which avoids both the “Afro-pessimism” of critics of change and the overly optimistic “cheerleading” stance of those who believe that change can be implemented quickly, smoothly, and therefore relatively free of pain. As poignantly noted in the title of the book, the authors underscore that even the best-intentioned and most reform-minded African leaders find themselves “hemmed in” by a variety of internal and international constraints that restrict policy choices but do not necessarily prevent policy success over the long term.

Unlike the majority of edited works, this volume represents a coherent piece of scholarship that is both theoretically intriguing and well written. A very useful introductory essay written by the editors sets out common themes, and a concluding essay (also written by the editors) highlights several “lessons” to be learned from the various contributions, cautiously highlighting the differences in interpretation that inevitably surface in group projects. In this regard, already well-integrated
contributions are further enhanced by what amounts to an ongoing dialogue between the contributors and editors (who sometimes differ with the conclusions of their contributors and do not hesitate to say so).

The greatest strength of this volume is the rigorous match between theory and substance. The contributors assess theoretical propositions through the use of extensive case study analysis of several anglophone and francophone countries, most notably Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. For example, Jeffrey Herbst (chap. 9) analyzes the politics of agricultural reform by comparing the cases of Ghana, Kenya, and Zimbabwe; Nicolas van de Walle (chap. 10) adopts the case study of Cameroon to demonstrate how the “rent-seeking activities” of a firmly entrenched “hegemonic alliance” (i.e., patrimonialism) can derail structural adjustment policies; and Jennifer Widner (chap. 8) utilizes the Cote d’Ivoire to highlight the political responses of rural farmers to economic decline. Although one may quibble with interpretations of individual authors (e.g., is Senegal truly a multiparty democracy or in reality a de facto single-party regime?), or critique the selection of case studies which inevitably neglects other than passing reference to the lusophone countries (Mozambique and its extensive economic restructuring of the 1980s springs immediately to mind), this volume clearly has set a standard of academic excellence one wishes was found in all edited works.

Two contributions are especially thought-provoking in terms of understanding the specific relationship between economics and politics in the democratization process in Africa. In chapter 5, Naomi Chazan and Donald Rothchild examine the political outcomes of the economic reform process. Whereas the disengagement of society away from the state is portrayed as the standard societal response to economic deterioration and political authoritarianism at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the structural adjustment policies undertaken by the majority of African regimes during the 1980s had the opposite effect: economy recovery programs facilitated “the growth of entrepreneurs who possessed sources of accumulation independent of the state” (and therefore could more effectively challenge the state), and fostered the blossoming of “networks of occupational, service, local community, religious and voluntary organizations” that served as the backbone of the democratization movements of the late 1980s and the early 1990s. However, this chapter, and the democratization literature in general, tend to imply that, due to their critical roles in pressuring authoritarian leaders to liberalize within both the economic and political realms, these new organizational structures are inherently democratic (or at least instill democratic values such as consensus building among their members) when in fact the exact opposite may be true. In this regard, many more studies are needed at the micro level, such as the dissertation field research of Amy S. Patterson (Indiana University) who is examining the democratic attributes of associational groups in rural Senegal, before the link between democratic groups in civil society and the creation of democracy in Africa can be fully understood.
Callaghy (chap. 12) offers a second especially thought-provoking analysis. Drawing upon the economic reform and political democratization literature from other regions of the world (most notably East Asia), Callaghy examines the ongoing debate as to whether effective economic reform is best carried out by authoritarian regimes which, after securing a certain level of development, begin the process of political liberalization. For example, it has been argued that the significant economic growth enjoyed by the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) of East Asia and Latin America can be attributed to policies carried out by authoritarian regimes interested in development, and that premature democratization would have inhibited the successful implementation of those policies. This debate takes on added urgency in light of the fact that Western scholars, politicians, and financial institutions as of the 1990s have been calling for simultaneous liberalization in both the economic and political realms in Africa. Drawing upon the experiences of the Ghanaian regime of Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings, the Nigerian regime of Ibrahim Babangida, and the Senegalese regime of Abdou Diouf, Callaghy underscores that political liberalization (i.e., transitions to democracy) may indeed hamper the successful implementation of already difficult economic restructuring programs. However, Callaghy also concludes that it is possible to facilitate economic reform “under certain democratic conditions” if the regime in question adopts proper political strategies, such as “clever political engineering” in which policymakers “shield key areas of policy from distributional and other political pressures by delegating them to autonomous institutions or processes” (505).

The importance of the so-called “Asian model” of liberalization among Africanists is perhaps best noted in the concluding essay by Callaghy and Ravenhill, a section of which is entitled: “If Korea Can Do It, Why Not Africa? Or: Limited Current Relevance But Possible Future Model.” The authors argue that the South Korean success story constitutes a “paradigmatic case of economic transformation in the Cold War era” which has significant implications for Africa and ongoing theoretical debates within the democratization literature for the simple reason that South Korean initiatives did not match “the neo-classical liberal prescriptions of the IMF and the World Bank” (546). Specifically, South Korean military leaders intent upon ending corruption and achieving “real economic development” in the aftermath of a 1961 military coup d’état did exactly the opposite of what IMF and World Bank analysts are demanding of African leaders today: they consolidated political power, curtailed political pluralism and participation, and institutionalized centralized decision-making procedures by technocrats almost completely free from societal pressures (i.e., the constraints of civil society). However, in both this and other chapters, the authors do not explore whether the success of what in essence constitutes an Asian authoritarian model of development is perhaps due to the existence of greater levels of ethnic homogeneity or other unique cultural attributes within the Asian NICs that simply cannot be reproduced in Africa’s current multiethnic and multicultural environment. Simply put, should
we focus on Asian culture and homogeneity or enlightened Asian authoritarianism as the basis for applying the Asian model to Africa?

Jeffrey Herbst, *The Politics of Reform in Ghana, 1982–1991*, extends the theoretical discussion through what constitutes one of the best case study analyses of economic and political reform within the African studies literature. Building upon rich case study literature launched during the modernization era by David E. Apter’s pioneering work, *Ghana in Transition* (1963), Herbst seeks to utilize the Ghanaian case in the pursuit of three major goals: (1) “provide an analytically informed view of the politics of comprehensive economic reform”; (2) “construct a better theoretical vision of how the African state functions”; and (3) “contribute to the general literature in economics and politics on long-term institutional change” (2–3). He admirably succeeds on all three counts.

Herbst’s case study of analysis—the Rawlings regime of Ghana during the 1980s—suggests that effective economic reforms are facilitated by authoritarian leaders who nonetheless are sincerely interested in the economic welfare of their countries. Indeed, Rawlings is portrayed as a strong-willed and at times, iron-fisted, leader who successfully imposed a series of IMF and World Bank–designed structural adjustment packages on an initially hesitant country, only subsequently seeking to politically liberalize his regime in a process perhaps best described as “guided democratization from above.” Utilizing the language of Callaghy, Rawlings clearly can be characterized as a leader who used “clever political engineering” to undertake badly needed economic reforms and, in the process, turn Ghana into one of the most widely touted “success stories” of the structural adjustment decade of the 1980s.

Herbst is especially adept at describing how the Rawlings regime was able to impose a program that discriminated against the urban population, particularly workers, while at the same time avoiding the strikes and urban unrest that derailed similar programs in other African countries. Herbst also concludes that, despite its proper focus on the rural areas (i.e., the areas where most Africans live), the economic restructuring program (and others like it in Africa) did not and cannot be expected to quickly foster the rise of a political constituency willing to provide critical support to the regime. Indeed, Herbst clearly demonstrates that theoretical models which assume that “even relatively dramatic economic growth” will lead “automatically” to the creation of either rural or urban constituencies for reform are simplistic and overly deterministic.

Serious books dealing with contemporary theoretical issues invariably push the discipline’s knowledge to its limits, and lead researchers to new questions and debates. Herbst definitely has produced one of these books. Specifically, as numerous African leaders look for solutions to their ongoing economic and political dilemmas, the critical question to be asked is whether the experience of the Rawlings regime can be extrapolated into a general theory of economic and political liberalization. In this regard, Herbst’s analysis raises several important questions demanding further research.
First, Rawlings was able to carry out economic reforms during the 1980s in the absence of the democratization movements that as of the 1990s are calling for simultaneous changes within the political sphere (including Ghana). The policymaking environment has thus radically shifted due to the end of the Cold War, perhaps limiting the applicability of the Rawlings experiment to the Cold War decade of the 1980s. In short, how important is the changed international environment, and what factors if any from the Cold War era of the 1980s are relevant to the post–Cold War era of the 1990s?

The Rawlings regime was also fortunate to undertake reforms at a time when foreign governments and institutions (such as the IMF) were willing to provide large sums of foreign assistance and investment to ensure the success of seriously pursued structural adjustment programs. Although Herbst himself recognizes that the “Rawlings regime’s decision to adopt a reform program came at a fortuitous moment, just as the international community was increasing resources to Africa” (35), he later optimistically suggests that “there is probably more than enough money in the World Bank for five or six more Ghanas” (133), and then finally concludes that “the international community has demonstrated that it is willing to devote substantial resources to those African countries that demonstrate serious efforts to reform their economies” (153). Unfortunately, the end of the Cold War has led to the marginalization of foreign assistance toward the African continent, and it remains unclear as to whether the vast sums of money provided to Ghana during the 1980s will be repeated during the 1990s.

Herbst’s analysis also suggests the necessity of further exploring the special qualities of the Rawlings regime, most notably the “charismatic” nature of Rawlings that would characterize him as a “princely ruler” in the typology of patrimonial regimes. In this regard, Herbst notes early on that Rawlings “had his hand on the popular pulse in Ghana as few other leaders have” (33), but also makes the point of deemphasizing theories that underscore the “political strength of the leader” (31). One can clearly argue that charismatic qualities (although impossible to learn by aspiring leaders) played a role in enabling Rawlings to undertake serious economic reform, just as they did in the case of Thomas Sankara and his radical restructuring of politics and economics in Burkina Faso. Unfortunately, charismatic leaders are few and far between, and, as demonstrated by the case of Sankara, their popular followings traditionally have been perceived as a threat by other elite groups, leading to often violent conflict (Sankara was executed in a military coup d’etat).

Most important, Rawlings’s charismatic qualities perhaps allowed him to attain more of a populist, rural-based following than suggested by Herbst, a factor which would explain why Rawlings was able to stifle urban dissent and enjoy relative stability among rural groups despite the fact that these latter groups “are still absolutely poorer than they were in the mid-1970s (much less than at independence) and will be for some time to come” (83). Indeed, Herbst’s own evidence at times can be interpreted as suggesting strong popular support in the rural areas. For example, voting in the 1988–1989 district assembly elections clearly demonstrated
strong support for the Rawlings regime in all regions except that of “Greater Accra” (the primary urban area which heavily suffered under reform policies).

Kjell J. Havnevik, *Tanzania: The Limits to Development from Above*, offers an analysis of another undemocratic case—the single-party, socialist regime of former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere—that initially sought to promote economic development and, during the 1980s, undertook a series of structural adjustment programs, prior to mounting pressures for political liberalization at the beginning of the 1990s. This book specifically seeks to explain how an externally dependent and increasingly authoritarian postcolonial state has undertaken ill-conceived “development from above.” Whereas the first section discusses the “emergence, development and breakdown” of what Havnevik refers to as the “postcolonial model” in Tanzania, subsequent sections detail three case studies of development: rural production in the Rufiji District; the Steiger’s Gorge hydroelectric project; and structural adjustment programs in the agricultural sector.

The book challenges the assumption that Tanzania under Nyerere constituted one of the most benevolent of single-party regimes, and underscores how the state made significant strides promoting mass literacy and the provision of basic human needs only at the expense of a failed overall economy. One of the primary reasons for this failure was that the initially “voluntary” villagization program—the centerpiece of Nyerere’s *ujamaa* ideology in which peasants were to be grouped together in new communal villages—ultimately became coercive in nature. Specifically, many peasants were forced off of their traditional (and productive) lands to villagization projects chosen by party bureaucrats that were either poorly conceived or simply inappropriate for farming practices. In short, the state inevitably became coercive (and therefore counterproductive to the goal of development) in the pursuit of development from above, an outcome which was further exacerbated, according to Havnevik, by the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s.

The most notable problem associated with the single-party experiment of Tanzania and its contemporaries was that it led to a “stagnation of ideas.” For example, although legislative candidates were allowed to run against each other under the unified banner of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)—Tanzania’s sole legal party prior to 1992—they were not permitted to question either the socialist domestic ideology or the foreign policy of the Nyerere regime. Candidates could debate the instrumental aspects of carrying out party-approved policies, but were unable to offer alternatives even in the face of obviously misguided policies. In this and other cases, ruling elites who felt they “knew best” restricted the range of political debate to such a degree that the single party ultimately became a means for maintaining control rather than a dynamic tool for promoting change and development.

The book offers a wealth of primary data on Tanzanian agriculture and development, including an excellent bibliography, and is at its best when describing the details of individual development projects. However, for those seeking a more theoretically informed analysis, especially as concerns the role of the African state, the book is less useful. Havnevik is also much more convincing in terms of his
discussion of the economic as opposed to the political realm of Tanzanian political economy, and one wishes that the various case studies would have been tied together within a more integrated theoretical framework. A better understanding of the dynamic interplay between economic and political liberalization during the 1980s and the 1990s is found in Michael F. Lofchie's chapter, Callaghy and Ravenhill.

If both Ghana and Tanzania constitute case studies of economic reform followed by political liberalization, Winsome J. Leslie, *Zaire: Continuity and Political Change in an Oppressive State*, provides the nonspecialist with the background necessary to understand how the Zairian regime of Mobutu Sese Seko has overseen the deterioration of the national economy while simultaneously resisting internal and international pressures for reform of the political system. The volume is designed as an introduction to Zaire, including chapters devoted to the historical setting prior to independence (chap. 1), the postindependence political system (chap. 2), society and culture (chap. 3), the economy (chap. 4), international relations (chap. 5), and the future (chap. 6). Winsome is especially adept at integrating the vast streams of existing literature available on Zaire to produce a volume that is both readable and informative to undergraduate students.

Leslie's analysis allows the introductory reader to understand how Mobutu skillfully utilized a combination of political maneuvering and repression to effectively forestall the efforts of a Zairian national conference convened by opposition parties at the beginning of the 1990s. Utilizing many of the classic tools of political survival that have enabled him to remain in power since leading a military coup d'état in 1965, Mobutu not only successfully stacked the national conference with hundreds of his own supporters (who subsequently were able to delay, divert, and water down the proceedings), but created and sponsored pro-government parties that, although legally independent, in essence have served as organizations for the maintenance of single-party rule. Equally important, Mobutu effectively fomented divisions within the opposition forces by "buying off" renegade members (several of whom have been provided with plum jobs within the government) and fostering ethnically based rivalries among delegates. In this regard, Winsome provides a good introduction to the impact of ethnic rivalries on Zaire's internal and international politics.

Winsome's analysis of Zairian politics also provides a useful starting point for understanding the roles of foreign countries in the democratization process in Africa. For example, candidate Clinton attacked the Bush administration during the 1992 presidential campaign for failing to distance itself from "corrupt and dictatorial leaders" in Africa, specifically in terms of failing to terminate aid to the dictatorial Mobutu regime. This sent a signal that the Clinton administration, along with Belgium and France, would once and for all place serious pressure on the Mobutu regime to democratize. Yet despite undertaking some minor steps designed to distance the United States from the Mobutu regime, the Clinton administration ultimately adopted a more status quo oriented policy that, similar to that pursued
by the Bush administration, perceives Mobutu as both "part of the problem" and "part of the solution" to what may become an increasingly violent political solution in Zaire. At the heart of the Clinton administration's revised approach to Zaire is an apparent acceptance of the "Mobutu or chaos" argument advanced by Zairian specialists in the U.S. policy-making establishment since Mobutu took power.