DEVELOPMENT AND ITS DISCONTENTS

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Dozens of countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern and Southern Europe made transitions from authoritarian to democratic forms of governance from 1974 to 1994, prompting American proponents of democracy, such as Samuel P. Huntington, to speak of democracy's "third wave" of expansion in world history (the first two waves began in the 1820s and 1940s).\(^1\) In the case of Africa, this third wave - often referred to as Africa's "second independence" - largely began in 1989, and was sparked by the end of the Cold War and the downfall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.\(^2\) Although one should not downplay the important impact of international factors on democratization in Africa, the primary impetus for this process was a variety of internal trends that prompted African ruling elites to negotiate with pro-democracy movements, such as severe economic stagnation and decline, the so-called "crisis" of the state, and popular demonstrations against rising human rights abuses and political repression.\(^3\)

Africanists initially viewed the democratization process in highly optimistic terms. "The prospects for democracy in Africa are now unquestionably brighter than they were three decades ago," explained Michael Clough, Senior Fellow for Africa at the New York Council on Foreign Relations, "if for no other reason than that Africans now know all too well the

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costs of failure of democracy." Adopting a more sanguine viewpoint, René Lemarchand warned of "compelling reasons to fear that the movement toward democracy may contain within itself the seeds of its own undoing," including the continued ability of authoritarian ruling elites to manipulate the democratization process for personal gain at the expense of the welfare of their respective political systems; the inability of opposition forces to rally around a credible alternative due to the religious, ethnic and regional divisions evident within most African societies; and the crushing socio-economic impact of internal economic decline and externally enforced structural adjustment programs (SAPs). Indeed, according to Claude Ake, what one is witnessing in Africa is "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. Yet regardless of whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, very few (if any) Africanists reject the normative value of a process that replaces authoritarian, single-party systems with more democratic forms of governance.

Differences of opinion over the strength and future viability of democracy in Africa are matched by an ongoing debate over the proper roles of external powers in facilitating the democratization process. According to Huntington, for example, the United States and the West in general should be in the forefront of ensuring that the "global democratic revolution" reaches "virtually every country in the world," including those on the African continent. Scholars operating from a more critical perspective seriously question the implications of external pressures for reform. Africanist Timothy M. Shaw underscores that Western pressures for what in essence constitutes the "Westernization" of Africa and the other regions of the Third World literally amounts to a new form of

6 This was the thesis of Ake's presentation at a conference sponsored by the Transnational Institute, "Democracy as Crusade: How Western Governments and Third World Elites are Trying to Use 'Democracy' as a Tool of Controlling the Third World", Cologne, Germany, November 13, 1993.
"neocolonialism". Several Africanists have even begun to speak of the "recolonization" or the "second scramble" for Africa (the "first scramble" was formalized in 1884-85 when the colonial powers divided up the African continent at the Berlin Conference in Germany).

The primary focus of this article is the internal dimension of the democratization process in Africa, most notably the varied roles of ruling elites as facilitators and impediments to change. For the purposes of our analysis, the ruling elite is defined as the small, privileged leadership sector of African societies that controls the reighs of government and sets the rules of the political system. This ruling elite historically assumed power through either civilian-based independence movements or military based coups d'etat (and, to a lesser degree, guerrilla insurgencies), and often finds itself in conflict with other elite groups seeking change within their respective societies. Those elites seeking change include opposition political leaders, lower ranking military officers, elders and the heads of women's organizations, ethnic and religious leaders, labor and student activists, and powerful financial and business interests.

After briefly outlining the authoritarian (i.e., anti-democratic) tendencies of African ruling elites from the 1950s to the 1980s, including a discussion of official rationales for the creation of single-party political systems, the majority of the longer version of this article focused on the responses of these elites to popular demands for democratization beginning in 1989. In order to provide a tentative assessment of the strength of African democratization movements, the longer version of this article specifically distinguished between six types of transition processes currently unfolding on the African continent: (1) regime change via multiparty elections; (2) regime change via the national conference; (3) co-opted transitions; (4) guided democratization; (5) authoritarian reaction; and (6) civil war and contested sovereignty.

The analysis of cases falling under each of the six types of transition processes clearly demonstrates that ruling elites have played the most critical role in the democratization process in Africa, invariably serving as either facilitators or impediments to rising popular demands for democracy. In the case of Benin, for example, President Kerekou's willingness to cede power to a national conference (and therefore act in the end as a facilitator) was critical.

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in avoiding the potential bloodbath that could have occurred if he had attempted to suppress the democratization process with the support of the military.

The willingness to accede to opposition demands seemingly has diminished as ruling elites have "learned the lessons" of democratization movements in neighboring countries - most notably that the failure to act quickly and decisively almost ensures their departure from office. In the case of Zaire, this meant a very proactive stance on the part of Mobutu to derail the national conference. In Côte d'Ivoire, Houphouët-Boigny quickly embraced the central demands of the democratization movement and held national elections before the opposition could mount an effective challenge. In the case of Ghana, Rawlings also pre-empted the opposition by implementing a tightly monitored reform process made possible by his control of the military and popular support in the countryside. Finally, Biya of Cameroon literally stole the elections and turned to more authoritarian tactics in their aftermath to silence opposition voices. The net result of these cases is that all four leaders were able to manipulate the democratization process to maintain their elite coalitions in power. It is precisely these types of responses, as opposed to the earlier, more accommodating stances, that appear to be most likely at least in the short-term future.

Yet even in those cases in which African countries have made a successful transition to more democratic forms of governance, their newly elected regimes are extremely fragile, and thus have not achieved levels of consolidation enjoyed within the industrialized West. As was the case with the inherited democratic systems of the 1950s and the 1960s, the newly formed democracies of the 1980s and the 1990s face the "great expectations-minimal capabilities" paradox that led to the creation of single-party political systems. In the case of Zambia, for example, a significant portion of the Zambian people seemingly believed that the overthrow of single-party rule and the ushering in of a multiparty system would somehow serve as a panacea for the country's economic problems. However, the combination of the minimal capabilities of the Zambian state and the constraints imposed on executive action by the democratic system have led to little success within the economic realm, followed by growing public weariness and disenchantment with the Chiluba regime.

The net result of Chiluba's declining popularity has been the necessity of coming to grips with the "authoritarian-democratic" paradox faced by ruling elites during the independence era. Although largely socialized and trained within an authoritarian tradition as were his predecessors, Chiluba is expected to abide by the "rules of the game" of the newly inaugurated multiparty political system. Strict adherence to those rules, however, could effectively seal
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Chiluba’s fate at the hands of new opposition movements who increasingly criticize his lack of leadership. Unfortunately, some of Chiluba’s responses to the growing economic and political crisis, most notably the imposition of a state of emergency, harken back to the authoritarian excesses of this predecessors and could severely undermine the very democratic political system he sought to create.

These paradoxes are not unique to Chiluba’s situation in Zambia, but are instead applicable to all the democratization movements in Africa. Similar to the decisions adopted by newly elected elites during the late 1950s and early 1960s which led to approximately thirty years of single-party rule on the African continent, the way in which current elites resolve these paradoxes during the decade of the 1990s may establish the outlines of new form of political rule in Africa that will continue to exist well into the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although it is still too early to make a definitive assessment as to what shape or form that political rule will take, it does appear that, at least for the short term, ruling elites more often than not will continue to act as impediments to the democratization process in order to maintain themselves in office.

The most important conclusion suggested by the preceding analysis, however, is that neither ruling elites nor their replacements in the cases of successful democratization have allowed the contest for governance to slip beyond their control. In other words, the contest over political ascendency in Africa still largely takes place among the same group of contestants: a very small elite (whether civilian or military) that generally favors political self-preservation over policies and political structures truly designed to benefit the disempowered majorities of most African countries. In case after case, ruling elites continue to impede the process of sharing political and economic power more broadly.

As suggested by our six-fold typology, however, the process of democratization in Africa and other regions of the world is extremely complex, and cannot be reduced to simple dichotomies of democratic and non-democratic outcomes. Different processes yield different outcomes, which in turn have different implications for the future evolution of African experiments with democracy. For example, countries currently employing relatively effective (albeit still flawed) democratic systems (such as Zambia and Botswana) are building the basis for effective links between civil society and newly reformulated state structures, and therefore deserve the support of foreign

10 See, for example, Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, "Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa," MSU Working Paper no. 1 on Political Reform in Africa, May 1993.
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governments and institutions. In other, more authoritarian cases, such as Cameroon and Kenya, foreign observers must resist the urge to reward superficial changes, and instead seriously consider coercive measures (such as economic sanctions) to strengthen the position of opposition movements relative to entrenched authoritarian elites. Yet as demonstrated in the case of U.N.-sponsored and U.S.-led military intervention in Somalia, the use of military force is incapable of imposing a solution from abroad, and may instead further intensify existing ethnic, clan, or religious animosities within a given country.