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Elections in Africa: A Fading Shadow of Democracy?

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Résumé: Les élections constituent un élément important dans la démocratie libérale. C'est un moyen viable de garantir un processus organisé d'alternance du pouvoir et de changement. C'est aussi un instrument d'autorité et de légitimation politiques. L'absence d'élections ou leur échec, reflète, dans une large mesure, la prédominance de la dictature politique et du pouvoir personnel en Afrique. La vague actuelle d'effervescence démocratique a déclenché un processus électoral ouvert et pluraliste, offrant à la société civile un cadre lui permettant d'exprimer ses doléances politiques à l'Etat. Cependant, la structure comme le processus des élections — la première étant l'infrastructure organisationnelle permettant de gérer les élections, et le second, les préceptes et la procédure des élections — restent largement pervertis. Aussi, brigandage et trucage des élections, violence et annulations d'élections, sont-ils monnaie courante. La tendance bascule dans le sens du retour du vieil ordre marqué par le despotisme politique, sous le manteau de la gouvernance civile. Les élections, dans la majeure partie des pays africains, sous leur forme pervertie actuelle, ressemblent à une pèle copie de la démocratie avec le risque de compromettre l'existence du projet démocratique déjà fragile.

Introduction

After about a decade in which the process of political renewal began in Africa, the democratic project appears to be in a quagmire or better still, in crisis in most African states. There seems to be a gradual, but dangerous re-institutionalisation of autocratic and authoritarian regimes masked in democratic garb. In some cases, yesterday's despots and military tyrants have re-surfaced as today's 'born-again' democrats to re-establish or perpetuate their rule, while in others, a new genre of budding autocrats are emerging (Adejumobi 1997; Decalo 1994). Apparently, elections and the electoral process constitute the major victims in this tendency towards democratic retreat. The precepts, structures and processes of elections are mostly

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characterised by reckless manipulations, politics of brinkmanship and subversion. Thus, the role and essence of elections in a democracy in terms of expressing popular will, engendering political changes and the legitimation of political regimes are highly circumscribed. In other words, the tendency in the present conjuncture, is to inveigh elections and regard it less as a catalyst, but more as a devalued element and a fading shadow of the democratic process in Africa.

In this paper, we shall examine the background to and the dimensions of the electoral crisis in Africa, within the context of the current democratisation process on the continent. First, we shall seek to discuss, in theory, the correlation between election and democracy, its limits and ecology. Second is to underscore what possibly have gone wrong with the electoral process and electoral politics in Africa and its implications for the democracy project on the continent.

Election and Democracy: The Theory and Ecology

The discourse and theories on democracy, especially in its libertarian form place election as a core variable, which bears an organic linkage with the concept (i.e., democracy). Indeed, earlier attempts at conceptualising liberal democracy equate it with the phenomenon of elections. According to Joseph Schumpeter 'democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them' (Schumpeter 1947:270). In other words, democracy is all about conducting elections and choosing political leaders. In a more revised form, liberal democracy is concerned as a 'political system characterised by regular and free elections in which politicians organised into parties compete to form the government, by right of virtually all adults citizens to vote and by guarantee of a range of familiar political and civil rights' (Sandbrook 1988). The key properties or elements of liberal democracy are; political participation of the citizens, competition among political agents especially parties and the granting of a host of civil and political liberties, which include freedom of expression, association and the press, sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1989; Sorensen 1993). All these three properties are related in one form or the other to the phenomenon of elections.

Robert Dahl in his theory of democratic Polyachy, considered the issue of election to be quite germane. Dahl identified seven criteria which a polyarchy must possess. These include, that election officials must be chosen and peacefully removed in frequent fair and free elections in which coercion is absent or quite limited, control over government decisions about policy is

constitutionally vested in elected officials, virtually all adults have the right to vote, most adults have the right to run for public offices in these elections, citizens possess civil and political rights, there is easy access to information unmonopolised by the state or a single group, and an enforceable right to form and join political organisation including political parties and interest groups (Dahl 1991:72-75).

Conceptually, election symbolises popular sovereignty and the expression of the 'social pact' between the State and the people, which defines the basis of political authority, legitimacy and citizen's obligations. It is the kernel of political accountability and a means of ensuring reciprocity and exchange between the governors and the governed. The more consent authority has, through elections, as Richard Rose (1978) argues, the better the rulers can economise on the use of their limited resources for compelling obedience. Further, elections typify the representation of popular demands and a basis for leadership recruitment and socialisation. As Richard Joseph noted 'renewal in democratic systems usually occur via elections. Any political system which does not undergo such will ultimately atrophise and suffer decay' (Joseph 1990). In other words, election constitutes perhaps, the most important element in the conception and practice of liberal democracy.

But to what extent is democracy reducible to and compatible with the logic of elections? And what are the limits? The social stratification theories of the elite and the Marxist analyses offer alternative viewpoints on the linkage between election and democracy and point out the limit of the former in realising the latter. For the elite theory of democracy, the organisation of society presupposes the existence of an oligarchy — a minority who controls the lives and actions of other people in the society, representative democracy therefore only provide a legal and political framework to justify and legitimise this minority rule. Put differently, elections do not represent the expression of any popular will, as the masses rarely determine the range of choices available before them or how those choices were arrived at. As Gaetamo Mosca observed 'the representative is not elected by the voters, but as a rule, has himself elected by them' (Bottomore 1964:5). As such, the notion of competition germane to elections is superfluous and meaningless.

The Marxist analysis, in questioning the democratic validity of elections, argue that elections constitute a system of political and ideological reification of the hegemony and power of the dominant class. It is a system of social acculturation through which dominant ideologies, political practices and beliefs are reproduced. Within the context of class differentiations and inequalities, political rights as enshrined in elections present little or no choice to the

dominated classes as the choice of candidates and agenda oscillates among members of the dominant class. The result therefore as Claude Ake (1995) points out, is a dissociation of voting from choosing and right from the exercise of political power. Along the Marxist concern, Antonio Gramsci has this to say:

> All that is necessary is to have ideological supremacy (or better, supremacy of passions) on the chosen day in order to win a majority which will govern for four or five years in spite of the fact that the masses of the electorate would dissociate itself from its legal expression once passions have died down (Gramsci 1952:158-9).

In essence, elections, according to the Marxist paradigm, guarantee little hope for political accountability, responsiveness and democracy. Indeed, the conception of democracy from the Marxist standpoint is from the popular as opposed to its liberal expression.

Despite the limitations of elections in the Marxist theory, the theory acknowledges elections as a positive, albeit insufficient step, towards the struggle for popular democracy. Karl Marx writing on the Jewish question in 1843, contends that the institutions and advances of liberal democracy, which include periodic elections, the granting of civil and political rights, the extension of the suffrage, representative institutions and the curtailment of arbitrary state power, must be taken seriously, as they constitute the process of political emancipation necessary to achieving human emancipation and liberation. Marx reasoned that these processes and institutions amount to a big leap forward, which is the best form of emancipation possible within the capitalist social order (Marx, edited work 1975). While elections may not approximate democracy and also offer little choice to the majority of the people, it is important as Marx emphasized, that elections as an element of liberal democracy must not be scorned, but taken seriously, even by Marxist scholars. According to Richard Sandbrook, elections and the struggle for liberal democracy are important because they allow the oppressed classes to put the question of alternative ideologies on the agenda and therefore constitute an important stage in the socialist quest to extend democratic control to the social and economic as well as political spheres (Sandbrook 1988). The questions which then arise are: what criteria underscore meaningful elections and under what conditions does elections make sense. In other words, what are the constitutive and regulative mechanisms and precepts necessary to promote healthy and free electoral competition and under what environmental conditions (socio-economic and political) do elections thrive? This is what I aptly describe as the ecology of elections.

The constitutive and regulative mechanisms and precepts of elections are about the structures and processes of elections. The former include, the establishment of a competent, relatively autonomous and non-partisan electoral body to administer the conduct of elections, the existence of an impartial judiciary to interpret electoral laws and adjudicate on electoral matters, a viable press and a non-partisan police force. The latter — that is, the processes of elections — involve the rules, procedure and activities relating to the conduct of elections. These are the electoral laws, the organisation of political parties, voters' registration, nomination of candidates for elective public office, balloting, counting of ballot and the declaration of election results (Jinadu 1995; Adejumobi 1997a). Added to this, is what Mackenzie refers to as the rules of the game. That is, there should be a general acceptance throughout the political community of certain vague rules of the game which limits the struggle for power and promotes healthy electoral competition (Mackenzie 1958).

The environmental conditions conducive to and supportive of meaningful elections, are what could be described as the pre-election variables. These cover socio-economic and political issues. The former involves creating relative economic well-being and social welfare for the people. The absence of this leads to what Alain Ronguie (1978) calls 'clientilist vote', in which the electorates are a captive situation, mainly trading off their votes for token material incentives from patrons. In other words, votes and elections become commodified. Certainly, voting and elections will count for little in an atmosphere of crippling poverty, want and despair (Adejumobi 1996; Ake 1995; Mamdani 1987).

Also, the political context of elections must not be such which mystifies the essence of elections. That is, elections must not serve as a passport for the tyranny of the majority. For where there is a tyranny of the majority as Smith Hempstone (1996:36) rightly observed, there can be no democracy. In essence, while the political context of a democracy may ensure majority rule, it must also guarantee minority rights, the due process, and equality before the law, transparency and accountability, limitations on the power of the state and a spirit of tolerance and compromise (Hempstone 1996; Fikentscher 1994).

Elections in Africa: A Historical Reflection

Elections, in terms of their origin in Africa, are colonial contraptions, which were evolved as part of the institutional transfer of the superstructure of liberal democracy (Jinadu 1995:76). Although the pre-colonial political systems in Africa had some shades of democratic principles and practices

embedded in them, however, the concept of voting and the notion of a political majority and minority were not part of the African political traditions (Buijtenhuijs and Rijnierse 1993; Albert 1992). Consensus, dialogue and the political collective, were emphasized, as opposed to the individualism, atomisation and the majoritarianism of the western capitalist political system.

As such, electoral history in Africa is an early twentieth century phenomenon. For example, in Nigeria, the elective principle was introduced in 1992, with the introduction of the Cliffords constitution. However, the process of political decolonisation from 1945, was marked by the extension of the franchise and the scope of representative institutions. Indeed, as Dennis Cohen argues, an electoral procedure was generally used to determine or at least to legitimate, the form, rate and direction of the decolonisation process (Cohen 1983:73).

While electoral pedagogy took place under colonial rule, colonialism produced three sharp contradictions or paradoxes for post-colonial electoral politics and behaviour, particularly of the leadership. First, colonialism by its very nature and character is antithetical to the logic and philosophy of elections and democracy. It was constructed on the fount of authoritarianism and domination. Thus, superintending the electoral process, particularly when the colonial regime itself was deeply interested and involved in the politics of power transfer, suggests a very complex and problematic situation. The extent to which impartiality, hence, freeness and fairness characterised the colonial electoral process was therefore questionable. Secondly, although the decolonisation project was woven around democratic principles and the ideals of self-determination and social justice, however, the emergent political elite were educated and socialised under a highly centralised and authoritarian order (Chazan 1993). This was to later impact on their post-colonial political behaviour. Thirdly, the statist character of colonial rule, which survived the era, was to later, determine the object and terrain of electoral competition. What are the implications of the foregoing for electoral politics in post-colonial Africa?

A demeaning politics of de-participation and the shrinking of the electoral arena, which characterised the post-colonial era in Africa had its roots in the colonial-pedigree. Post-colonial politics was constructed on the logic of neo-patrimonialism, in which state offices and rents were appropriated, with the state serving as the focus of capital accumulation and the fulcrum of social control (Adejumobi 1997:125-145). The way of doing politics, to use the words of Max Weber, was therefore not to live for it, but to live from it (Ibrahim 1994). Elections in this context could at best be restricted and at

worst, anomic. One party rule, military regimes and what Robin Luckham (1994) calls 'garrison socialism' are therefore what littered the continent, all placing little premium on the issue and importance of elections and the electoral process. African leaders generally, had a lethargy and disdain for open and competitive elections which may threaten the basis of their power and authority. Thus, Milton Obote, former Ugandan president, for example, was reported to have made the remark that an election is a way of controlling the people, rather than being a means through which they could control him (Cohen 1983:85-86). In the same vein, Mohammed Momoh, former Sierra Leonian president, claimed that multi-party competitive elections often lead to anarchy, thereby justifying one-party rule as an elixir to inter-ethnic and inter-party conflicts and the promotion of national cohesion (Kpundeh and Reiley 1992:266).

The nature of elections in the post-colonial era in Africa therefore tilted towards a state-regulated non-competitive model. In countries like Togo, Benin, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Angola, and Sudan, there was *de-jure* one-party rule, where 'make-shift' elections were organised to legitimise the political order. In countries like the Gambia, Botswana, Mauritius, Zimbabwe and Senegal (Post 1976) although periodic multi-party elections were held, a *de-facto* one-party rule existed where elections alter neither the leadership, administration nor the regime. Huy Hermet (1978) describes this kind of elections as 'Pluralist coercive elections'. Except only in Mauritius where there was the alternation of parties in government, through elections.

Relatively open and competitive multi-party elections usually occur in Africa mostly during the period of military disengagement from politics, as was the case in Nigeria (1979), Ghana (1969, 1979) and Uganda (1980). The election is usually preceded by a process of political and constitutional engineering, aimed at establishing the requisite institutions and structures of democratic rule. The major set-backs of this election are two-fold. First, the military, like the colonial regime, is not an impartial arbiter or social actor in the process of its own disengagement from power. Thus, the social forces and precepts which are thrown up or suppressed in the electoral and political processes, are determined by it. As General Ibrahim Babangida usually comment during his regime's tortuous transition to civil rule programme; 'while we do not know those who will succeed us, we definitely know those who will not' (Adejumobi 1995). The implications is that the military often unduly interface with the electoral process, to determine the outcome of elections. Secondly, post-military regimes as Bayo Adekanye (1984) rightly argues, are usually very frail and susceptible to the praetorian instincts of the

military. The elected civilian leaders, socialised in military tradition, mostly behave like military administrators, repressing the people, squandering public resources and rigging elections. All these were well dramatised in the Nigeria experience between 1979 and 1993 (Adejumobi 1997; Othman 1984; Falola and Ihonvbere 1985).

The culture of 'massaged' elections thrived substantially in Africa, not because of a lack of a vibrant civil society, as most analyses wrongly assume, rather, it was largely because of the international political context or environment. The cold war politics de-emphasized the object of real elections and genuine democracy and prioritised the search for political allies in the ideological power game. Thus, from both ends — East or West tyrants were sustained in Africa and political agitations for multi-party elections were ruthlessly put down with the active support of the two power blocks. In other words, it is incorrect to assume that Africans never craved for democracy for there is no undemocratic country where democratic struggle are not being waged, (Ake 1992; Lopes 1996), rather, Africans were so denied of democracy by a confluence of internal and international factors;

Multi-Party Elections and Political Renewal in Africa

The late 1980s and early 1990s in Africa was characterised by a general trend towards plural politics and multi-party electoral competition. The popular political clichés were 'elections', 'multipartyism', 'civil society' and 'democracy'. Between 1985 and 1991, no less than twenty eight (28) authoritarian regimes were forced to liberalise the political arena, while multi-party elections were held in eight countries. By 1997, about three-quarters of African countries were under 'democratic rule' succumbing to the logic of periodic elections, albeit mostly with questionable content (Adejumobi 1997; Bratton and Van de Walle 1992).

Two factors tend to account for the changing political scene in Africa. First, within the context of declining economic fortunes and severe material poverty of the people, authoritarian and one-party rule appeared to have squandered their social capital and political legitimacy. Alternative political choice in competitive multi-party elections and democratic politics became palpable. Secondly, the shift in the international political economy coalesced to make a difference in the choice of political system in Africa. The hegemony of the liberal capitalist ideology led to the 'Internationalisation' of the issues of market reforms and liberal democracy. The object of liberal democracy, therefore, became a major issue in bilateral and multilateral development cooperation, between Africa and the western world. Multilateral institutions like the Commonwealth, the OECD, the European Union (EU), the

International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the United Nations, began to promote the cause of human rights, rule of law and democracy as issues of concern in their support for Africa. Major donor countries like the United States, Canada, Britain and France, also made democratic issues, prerequisites for continued aid flow and economic assistance. For example, the urge to allow multi-party elections in Kenya was influenced by this development, when in 1991, western donors decided to freeze $350 million (out of about $1 billion) in quick disbursing aid to the country. Arap Moi, the president of Kenya, therefore, grudgingly agreed to constitutional changes to allow for multi-party elections in December 1992 (Hempstone 1996). In Ghana, Rawlings acceded to a return of the country to constitutional rule largely in order to court the favour of and maintain the goodwill of the donor community. Thus, Rawlings announced the transition programme on 10 May 1991, four days before the crucial donors conference in Paris from May 14-15, 1991 (Quaye 1995a).

The pattern and course of the democratic process differ among African countries, so also is the nature, context and outcome of elections. In the large part, the way the political transition was negotiated influenced the electoral processes. We could delineate four major patterns. First, there are countries where the civil society was quite vociferous and organised, took the initiative for political reforms, engaged the state in a fierce political battle and stamped its will on the course of the transition. In this regard, the new political actors ensured that electoral laws were overhauled, to allow for free and fair electoral competition and the institutional infrastructure of elections, namely, the electoral body, the judiciary, the press and the police were insulated from or made less pliant to the ruling regime. Indeed, in some cases, the opposite forces secured the tacit allegiance, sympathy or support of some of those institutions. The result was that the opposition were able to oust the incumbent regimes from power through elections (for example, Benin Republic, Zambia, Malawi, Congo and Cape Verde).

In the second category are countries where the civil society took the initiative for political reforms which was however, scuttled or hijacked by the ruling regime. The consequence was that the existing obnoxious electoral laws were either left untouched or were not significantly altered, while the paternal control of the regime over the electoral process remained rife. Elections were either not held or produced the same old result in those countries. Examples are Togo, Kenya and Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo).

The third pattern is that where the state took the initiative of political reforms, promoting a form of 'guided democracy' in which it consciously

managed, regulated and manipulated the electoral process in order to impose its interest and will on it. Little was achieved in terms f producing meaningful results through elections. This was the case in Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Cameroon and Algeria. The Algerian and Nigerian situations, remain classic examples, where election results were annulled in 1992 and 1993 respectively by those Tiyambe Zeleza (1996) aptly refers to as 'Bullies in uniform' (The Military). The callousness which characterised the Nigeria experience has been well analysed (Adejumobi 1997a; Momoh 1997; Lewis 1994; Campbell 1994; Nwokedi 1994; Ihonvbere and Vaughan 1995).

Finally, are political transitions which dissolved into severe political conflicts and civil wars. Examples are Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan and Somalia. In Liberia, after about a decade of a fratricidal civil war, elections were finally held under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), monitored by its military organ, ECOMOG, in July 1997. Charles Taylor, the main rebel leader won the presidential elections.

Clearly, the democratic project in Africa remains hazy and precarious, so is election and the electoral process. However, expectations are rife, both within and outside Africa, that multi-party elections will usher in an era of political renewal, democracy and good governance. What are the recent unfolding developments in this regard, and how can the future of elections and democracy being viewed in Africa? To this we turn presently.

Elections Without Choice? The Crisis of Elections and Democracy in Africa

Although multipartyism and elections are fast becoming the norm in Africa, it is important to distinguish between the form and content of a phenomena. In most African countries, recent developments suggest that elections appear to be only an expedient political exercise for ruling regimes, partly because of its economic implications in terms of external aid flows and economic assistance and also partly because of its public relations advantage, in propping up the political profile of the regimes in the international arena. Even where those regimes came into power through popular elections like in Zambia, they have since relapsed into autocratic rule, conducting 'fabricated' elections. Thus, the dominant practice is that most rulers organise electoral 'coup d'état' which ensures their 'selection' in the name of popular electoral process. The tactics employed include, stifling the opposition parties and reducing them to docility, covertly corrupting the electoral process or election rigging. This conduct approximates what Samuel Huntington (1970) long described as 'liberal machiavellian elections'.

The experience of countries like Niger, Gambia, Ghana, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Togo, Kenya, Zambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Uganda are not far from this. In Zimbabwe, it has been difficult transforming the psychology of liberation struggles into that of democratic consciousness. Opposition parties remain very weak and depreciated, while Robert Mugabe and his party, ZANU-PF have remained in power since 1980. In Zambia, Patrick Chiluba, has turned out to be a 'small despot' manipulating electoral laws and processes to perpetuate his rule. In 1995, the constitution was unduly amended, purposely directed against Kenneth Kaunda, to read that 'non indigenous' Zambians cannot contest presidential elections. That is, a criterion for contesting the presidency is that both parents of the candidate must be Zambians. Kaunda's parents are alleged to be Malawians. Furthermore, the government white paper on electoral matters also stated 'no person who has been elected twice should be eligible to stand again' (Ihonvbere 1996:103). Clearly, this provision was also targeted against Kaunda. It is tragic that someone like Kaunda who led Zambia through tortuous independence struggles could be an object of political blackmail and humiliation by politicians like Chiluba. It was through this kind of rough and dubious political tactics that Chiluba secured re-election in 1996.

Some more debilitating electoral experiences present themselves in countries like the Gambia, Niger and Ghana, which we shall review in some details. In the three countries, the political transition pattern was the 'military turned political' model, in which the military leaders sought to civilianise themselves in power through conducting national elections (Adekanye 1979). These military leaders (i. e., Jerry Rawlings — Ghana, Yaya Jammeh — Gambia and Ibrahim Mainassara — Niger) were essentially reluctant 'democratisers' who despised and derided the concept of human rights and democracy. For example, Yaya Jammeh who seized political power in the Gambia on July 22, 1984 from the octogenarian ruler, Dawuda Jawara, after 29 years in office, described human rights as 'illegitimate sons of Africa', which should be sent 'six feet deep' and democracy as not being for Africans (*Vanguard*, October 14, 1996:18). In Ghana, whenever the issue of transition to civilian rule was raised, the usual response of Jerry Rawlings and his cohorts in the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) was to report quite rhetorically, 'Hand over power to whom' (Ayee 1996:434). The implication is that when these military dictators were eventually forced to democratise, they did so with a low commitment to the process and a poor adherence to rules and the due process.

The nature and politics of the electoral process and its outcome were the same in the three countries (Gambia, Niger and Ghana). Deleterious manipulations and control characterised every phase of the transition process, which include the process of constitutional engineering, establishment and control of the electoral body, subversion of electoral rules and regulations, the abuse of the electioneering process, voters' registration and the conduct of elections.

In the Gambia, although Yaya Jammeh wanted to embark on a four-year transition plan, political pressures made him to revise it to two years. The transition project took off with the drawing up of a new constitution for the country by a constitutional commission, a body made up of state appointees. The constitution was subjected to a national referendum on August 4, 1996, which was overwhelmingly approved by a vote of 70.4 per cent, against 27.6 per cent. However, the constitution was only made public four-days before the referendum, which made Gambians to barely understand the content of what they were voting for. The overwhelming vote by the Gambian people, therefore, was not really for the constitution *per se*, but one simply for democracy.

In two respects, Jammeh was believed to have altered the constitution and electoral laws to suit his personal interest and ambition. First, the age requirement for the presidency was lowered from a minimum of about 40 years, to between 30-70 years, precisely because Jammeh was then only 31 years old. Also, the constitution provided that members of the armed forces and the judiciary are not allowed to contest elections, which meant technically that Jammeh and his colleagues in the ruling junta, were disqualified from the elections. However, the constitution was amended to specify that Jammeh and his colleagues could retain their posts until after the transition elections, while also being allowed to contest. Jammeh only resigned from the military shortly before the presidential election and still stayed on to power.

With regard to the electoral process, the Jammeh regime circumscribed the autonomy of the electoral body — the Provisional Independent Electoral Commission (PIEC) and 'ambushed' the ill-prepared political parties into hurriedly arranged elections. While the Chairman of the electoral body, Gabriel Roberts, argued that the political associations needed at least three months to organize themselves, form and register their parties, and that the commission also needed the same time for adequate preparations for the elections, however, the Jammeh junta insisted that the entire election process must be concluded in less than a month. The ban on politics was lifted in late August 1997, and the presidential election scheduled for 26 September 1996.

Expressing the frustrations of the political association, the leader of the Gambian Peoples Party (GPP), Hassan Musa Camara noted that:

> Even though the ban is lifted we cannot operate as political parties, Parties have to register and registration conditions so restricted. It would be practically impossible to take part in elections. To carry out this exercise in a few weeks for parties banned for two years is almost impossible (*Punch*, August 19, 1996).

The truth is that while Captain Jammeh had about two years to perfect his strategies and build a vast informal political and party networks, the other parties were given barely a month to get their acts together, ostensibly in an attempt to provoke confusion and tardiness in their preparations for the elections.

In addition, the political space was contrived by the regime. Three political associations and their officials were banned from participating in politics. This included Dawuda Jawara and his Peoples Progressive Party (PPP). These politicians were alleged to have peculated public funds, and were indicted by a panel of inquiry — the Public Assets and Property Commission. While the Commission recommended a five-year ban on those culprits, Jammeh imposed a 20-year ban, fuelling speculations that the decision was taken to keep Jawara out of the public turf and clear the coast for a smooth sail for Jammeh at the presidential polls.

The electioneering process saw Jammeh deploying state resources, human and material, to further his interest and flagrantly violating electoral regulations, for the campaigns, Jammeh ordered super-wax textile materials worth over $500,000 from a Nigerian textile company based in Kaduna (*Sunday Concord*, October 6, 1996:7). The clothes were embossed with the portraits of Jammeh and his wife, which were to be distributed as 'Greek gifts' to the Gambian electorates during political campaigns. Furthermore, all the security agencies — the police, soldiers and the para-military groups — were seen openly campaigning for Jammeh, with some adoring the emblem of Jammeh's party, Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC). These security forces harassed, intimidated, arrested and maimed supporters of the opposition parties, claiming quite spuriously that they had done so because Jammeh's posters were being defaced on the streets. The electoral commission indicted these security forces of being partisan in the political campaigns, which was a violation of the electoral regulation, and advised them (although to no avail) to desist (*Guardian* 26 September 1996).

The press coverage of the political campaigns was grossly in favour of Jammeh, which runs foul of the electoral regulation, that press must give

equal coverage to all the parties and candidates. The table below indicates the press coverage of the presidential candidates by radio and television stations.

Minutes of Air time Allotted to the Presidential Candidates for Political Campaigns on Radio and Television

Candidate	Radio	Television
Jammeh	480 minutes	1,590 mins (88.3 per cent)
Jatta	150 minutes	120 mins (6.7 per cent)
Bah	30 minutes	30 mins (1.7 per cent)
Darboe	0. minute	60 mins (3.3 per cent)

Source: *Vanguard*, 26 September 1996:4.

At the peak of the political campaigns and during the voting exercise, there were alleged threats to the lives and safety of the opposition candidates. Indeed, the major opposition candidate, Ousainu Darboe, of the United Democratic Party (UDP), had to seek refuge at the Senegalese Embassy for 'security reasons', during and immediately after the elections.

In essence, while the voting in the presidential elections in the Gambia may appear to have been 'free and fair', the entire electoral process was not. Expectedly, Jammeh won the election as follows:

Jammeh	220,011 (55.76 per cent)
Darboe	141,387 (35.84 per cent)
Bah	2,759 (5.52 per cent)
Jatta	11,337 (2.8 per cent)

What occurred in the Gambia as an observer puts it is transition '419' (using a Nigerian parlance signifying fraud) (Odion 1996:17) or as another described it 'Jammeh's triumph, is democracy's agony in the Gambia (Olufade 1996:18).

The hollow democratisation process in Niger under Colonel Ibrahim Barre Mainassara is a reenactment of the political revue in the Gambia, except for its incredible level of crudity and bestiality. Mainassara in January, 1994, seized political power through a military coup from the civilian administration of President Mohammed Ousmane, elected in January 1993. The coup was widely condemned, while most Western nations vowed not to recognize, but

isolate the regime unless it democratizes. Mainassara embarked on a form of 'machine-gun' democratization (*Vanguard*, July 21, 1996). In six months, the whole process of political and constitutional engineering and the holding of general elections including presidential elections were consummated between February and July, 1996. Like in Gambia, Mainassara manipulated the entire process. The peak of it was during the presidential election in July, 1996, when Mainassara, realizing the possibility that he may lose the election when the election results were being gradually announced, dissolved the electoral body — the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and replaced it with a new body — the National Electoral Commission (CNE). In addition, Mainassara placed all the other presidential candidates under house arrest and outlawed public demonstrations, and gatherings in order to prevent any show of public support for the opposition parties. Consequently, Mainassara got the new electoral body to declare him elected as president. The CNE claimed that Mainassara polled 836,719 out of the total 1,359,613 votes cast at the presidential polls.

In reaction to the electoral fraud by Mainassara, domestic protests were ignited which led to the setting ablaze of a police station in Niamey, and also the call by trade unions for a strike action by the workers. The international community also described the electoral charade. In a release by the White House spokesman, Mike McCurry noted that 'the United States condemns the actions by the regime of General Ibrahim Mainassara to interfere with the electoral process and deny the Niger citizens, the right to determine Niger's political future' (*Daily Champion*, July 17, 1996). Despite these recriminations, Mainassara rough-shod the Nigerian electorates and held on to his 'gun-boat' electoral victory.

In Ghana, the political transition script under Jerry Rawlings was akin to that of his 'colleague at arms' in Niger and the Gambia, although his own set the precedence for the latter two. The processes of the transition, including the background phase, which included the works of the National Commission for Democracy (NCD), the Committee of Experts, (CE) and the Consultative Assembly (CA) were all monopolised and manipulated by Jerry Rawlings as a mechanism of self-survival (Quaye 1995:568). The second phase involved the electoral process; the enactment of electoral laws, organisation of political parties and their activities and the conduct of the elections.

Preparations toward general elections in Ghana started effectively with the establishment of an 11-member Interim National Electoral Commission (INEC) on 11 November 1991, to organize and conduct elections during the transition period. By August 1992, INEC had registered seven political parties,

while processing the application of four others. There were serious apprehensions in the civil society as to whether the electoral body could do a good work. First was on the question of the autonomy of the electoral body. Second, and perhaps more important, was the political context in which the elections were to take place. There were severe repressions of the civil society by Rawlings with the respect for basic human rights virtually non-existent (Haynes 1991; Quaye 1995). Rawlings' 'revolutionary' Militia like the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR) and the Force Reserve Battalion (FRB) otherwise known as the 'Commandos' were essentially hit squads, which attacked political opponents and ruthlessly suppressed dissenting views, even before the inception of party politics. They were later to become veritable tools for Rawlings in the electoral arena. The press also existed under the sledge hammer of the regime. The Newspaper Licensing law (PNDCL 211), gave sweeping powers to the regime to deal with media houses and journalists. Many journalists were hounded by it. The sceptical mood of the civil populace in Ghana towards the ensuing elections is well captured by Afari-Gyan:

> The suspicion that election could be rigged is not the only problem faced by INEC. There are other two such problems. One relates to the powerlessness of the Commission to deal effectively with a host of factors that could impinge on free and fair elections. Such include fair play in the electioneering process; the issue of access to the media and resources available to a party to carry out its activities.... Moreover, the election time-table was fixed by Government before the Commission was created, thus placing it beyond the power of the Commission to alter it (Afari-Gyan 1994:41).

The political campaign and the voting process, confirmed the apprehensions of most Ghanaians on the transition elections, especially the November 3, 1992 presidential election. In the electioneering process, the militia (the CDRs and the FRD), and also the state-financed women's movement: the 31st December Women Movement (DWM) led by the wife of Jerry Rawlings, Mrs. Nana Konadu Rawlings, formed the campaign cadres of Jerry Rawlings. They intimidated, cajoled and threatened the people, both in the urban and the rural areas, that if Rawlings did not win the presidential election, 'Armageddon' would be let loose in Ghana. During the campaigns, Rawling himself, was reported to have on television called his opponents various derogatory names like 'punks', 'rogues', 'disgruntled politicians' and 'thieves', who cannot succeed him. However, the right of the opponents to reply through the same medium was largely denied (Quaye 1995:571).

The presidential election of November 1992 in Ghana which was won by Jerry Rawlings evoked serious controversies with allegations of massive

election rigging levied against Rawlings and his party — the National Democratic Congress (NDC). All the opposition parties rejected the election results. The rigging methods alleged to have been employed by Rawlings and his party include, collaboration with the electoral body and its officials, intimidation of voters, manipulation and pre-programming of election results, arbitrary opening and closing of polls, and voting by ineligible persons and minors (Boahen 1995; Quaye 1995a). Indeed the National Progressive Party (NPP) went ahead to document these alleged nefarious acts by Rawlings and the NDC in a monograph entitled *The Stolen Verdict.*

In 1996, Rawlings and the NDC also repeated the same 'magical' electoral feat they performed in 1992. The party clinched 130 out of the 195 seats in the parliamentary poll, with the other parties trailing far behind; NPP — 59, PCP (Peoples Convention Party) — 5, and PNC (Peoples National Convention) — 1. In the December 7 1996 presidential election, Rawlings won a 'landslide' victory. He won 4,924,253 votes constituting 57.2 per cent, while his main rival had 2,805,406 or 39.9 per cent. Undoubtedly, the political context and terrain remain uneven among the political actors, with Jerry Rawlings reeling the 'might' of the state, to shape and influence the course of the electoral process.

The emerging scenario as our preceding analyses revealed, is that what is currently taking place in Africa is largely 'elections without choice', of caricature elections, which rarely advance the cause of a true and genuine democracy.

Concluding Remarks

The future of elections and democracy in Africa remains quite controversial, albeit one of conjectures. In some quarters, pessimism reigns, the thinking is that as soon as the current global tide of democracy recedes, African States would likely slide back into political strife, dictatorship and military rule (Decalo 1994). Others believe that the process would be messy, fitful, rough, tough and slow, yet, over time it would grow and mature (Diamond 1990; Ibrahim 1995). Still, some contend that what is happening in Africa is a mere 'smokescreen' and not any real manifestation of democracy, for to identify democracy with multipartyism and elections is simply to caricature and devalue democracy (Ake 1992, 1995; Beckman 1989; Ihonvbere 1996; Ntalaja and Lee 1997).

Perhaps, the real issue should not be whether multi-partyism and elections are desirable in Africa, or whether they serve as the basis of democracy. This argument appears to me, to be sterile and less productive. Rather, the focus should be on the nature of multi-party elections being consummated in Africa.

Presently, the emphasis is on the form, rather than the content. Thus any 'Kangaroo' election is permissible and applauded in the International fora. This obviously will lead Africa, once again, to a political dead-end.

Making sense of elections in Africa as a major component of liberal democracy will require changes in five areas. First, promoting constitutionalism and the rule of law. This will guarantee some relative fairness and openness in electoral matters. Secondly, ensuring the neutrality and relative autonomy of the institutional infrastructure of elections, viz — the electoral body, the judiciary, the press and the police. Thirdly, empowering the civil society in order to act as a purveyor of democratic values and practices in the state. Fourthly, augmenting the material poverty of the people, which often promote electoral 'clientelism and servitude'; and finally, addressing the issue of the crisis of accumulation in Africa which makes the capture of state power, a priceless political project, for which all tactics, fair and foul, are permissible.

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