Political Instability and the Prospects for Democracy in Africa

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RÉSUMÉ. - La démocratie revêt en elle-même et par elle-même un caractère important pour le développement de l'Afrique. Au centre de l'échec des pays africains à tracer des voies viables pour le développement (ou l'industrialisation) se trouve le problème de l'absence de personnes envers qui on est responsable, d'où celui de démocratie aussi. Depuis l'indépendance, le rôle du citoyen dans la conduite des affaires du gouvernement a été systématiquement réduit. La scène politique s'est retrécie. La démobilisation politique est devenue plutôt la règle que l'exception dans le comportement du régime. La manipulation sociale pour expliquer et entretenir la répression politique a été la préoccupation de la plupart des gouvernements : tout cela a contribué à consolider un aspect notoire mais commun à presque tous les gouvernements africains : la mauvaise utilisation des ressources publiques ainsi que leur canalisation vers des gains privés pendant que les chances d'exploiter les procédures viables pour un développement local sont négligées ou délibérément détruites. Ainsi s'est-il établi une corrélation nette entre l'absence de démocratie dans la politique africaine et la détérioration des conditions soico-économiques. Par le truchement de la politique de contrôle, les conflits sociaux n'avaient fait que passer au second plan et pouvaient éclater de façons incontrollables et désorganisées à n'importe quel moment. Ces systèmes de gouvernment non participatif à parti unique ou sans parti étaient donc, de par leur nature, instables. Ces contradictions internes sont aggravées par les puissances étrangères qui interviennent pour modeler le processus politique en leur faveur.

Introduction

There is no doubt that there is a resurgence of interest in the study of democracy and the prospects for democratic politics in Africa. This time the initiative has not been taken by expatriate academics looking for "fresh pastures" to try out their research problems, but by African scholars themselves seeking solutions to the current crisis[1].

Democracy, it is contended in one study that is already published[2], is important to Africa's development in and of itself. At the center of the failure

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1 See, for example, P. Anyang' Nyong'o (ed.) Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa (London: ZED Books, 1987). This book was the outcome of a research project undertaken by one of the working groups in the United Nations University (UNU) African Regional Perspectives programme and conducted by the African Bureau of the Third World Forum. Much more recently, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) has initiated a similar working group on Social Movements, Social Transformation and the Struggle for Democracy in Africa.

2 Anyang' Nyong'o, Ibid.

of African states to chart viable paths for development (or industrialization) is the issue of lack of accountability, hence of democracy as well. Since independence, the role of the citizen in the affairs of government has systematically been reduced. The political arena has shrunk, political demobilization has become more the norm than the exception in regime behaviour and social engineering to rationalize and sustain political repression has been the preoccupation of most governments. All this has come about to cement one notorious but common aspect of almost all African governments: the misuse of public resources and their being channeled into private gains as possibilities for viable processes of indigenous development are neglected or deliberately destroyed. There has thus emerged a definite correlation between the lack of democracy in African politics and the deterioration in socio-economic conditions[1].

From time to time, either as a result of competition for state positions or popular pressure from below for some kind of change, the military has intervened in African politics to try and do something better in governing these societies[2]. Almost in every case, the military has not done anything better. On the contrary, military coups have only succeeded in making changes in government more frequent and unpredictable while, at the same time, making more complicated the accountability problem[3]. In the last analysis, the ordinary citizens, discontented though they may be with the status quo, rarely have the chance to decide whether or not they need a military government to save them from the mess. Thus the instability brought about by frequent military coups d'etat are but an outcome of the undemocratic political system and not a popular attempt to deal with this situation and correct it.

Yet the control of the state is very important in Africa, for on state action and public policy depend many things that affect people's lives to-day and in the future. In developing countries, more so than in the industrialized countries, the role of the state in socio-economic development as well as the day-to-day life of society is critical. Since the private sector is so weak, and since there are so many modern amenities that society, in general, is in need of, only the state, acting on behalf of society, can provide these. If the state cannot do so, then foreign investors may. But there are certain forms of investment that foreign capital is not likely to be enthusiastic about in Africa. For example, the building and maintenance of roads can only be undertaken by the state. The state, in turn, has to raise the resources necessary for this from taxes. It therefore follows that the people must not only be in a position to pay these taxes, they must also be able to know and ensure that their meagre resources

1 Ibid., Introduction, p. 19.

2 See also Anyang' Nyong'o, Military Intervention in African Politics, Third World Affairs, 1986 (London: Third World Foundation, 1986).

3 See, in particular, Emmanuel Hansen, The State and Popular Struggles in Ghana, 1982-86, in Anyang' Nyong'o (ed.) Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa.

are properly and effectively used by the state. *This they cannot do if there is no culture of participation and accountability in the political process.* In other words, the issue of democracy is not only at the center of the daily affairs of governance, it also influences the extent to which surpluses can be generated in the sphere of public ventures to ensure some accumulation.

The Misplaced Optimism of Modernization Theories

Right from the time of independence, the issue of democracy, development and political stability was not seen from this perspective if ever it was posed at all. During the first decade of independence, there was more-or-less an academic as well as a political consensus that the new nations in Africa needed to be modern. Edward Shils was even more categoric in his assertions: the new African elites, he contended, want modernization[1]. According to Shils, this meant that they wanted modern things like were found in the west. Modernization, as it were, was the same as westernization.

The idea of modernization, by itself, was not new; even the missionaries had had it in their agenda. The idea that this modernization needed modernizing elites and states in Africa was, of course, the brain child of both the behavioural sciences and post-independence ideology of developmentalism. *States* were seen to be beneficial and necessary for the collective good: they were not viewed as institutions of political power that could be captured by certain social forces to pursue their own sectarian interests as the literature of the 1970s in the social sciences later tried to point out. *Nations*, it was argued, certainly by contrast to *colonies,* are the most efficient and effective way to mobilize human resources in a social unit large enough to permit the benefits deriving from an extensive division of labour combined with a universalistic-achievement orientation[2].

Nation-building therefore became the watchword for both the politician and the scholar. The politician sought to practise it through policies and ideologies of national unity while the scholar was engaged in generating models and structural-functional prerequisites for national integration. Modernization, as a social process of change, encapsulated the parameters for model-building by the social scientists and the goal-achievements by the nationalists now in state power. If the goals were not being realized, analysis always ended up looking for the missing variables: it was assumed that some correct arrangement would produce the intended results. Distinctions were therefore made between states that had capacities to undertake modernization tasks (e.g. those endowed with capital and modernizing elites) and states that lacked such capacities. Where such capacities were lacking, then appropriate programmes

1 Edward Shils, Political Development in New States (The Hague: Morton and Co., 1960).

2 See, for example, I. Wallerstein, The Road to Independence: Ghana and the Ivory Coast (Paris: Mouton, 1964); C.C. Wrigley, Historicism in Africa: Slavery and State Formation, African Affairs 70, 279 (1971): 113-124. Both referred to in J. Lonsdale, States and Social Processes, The African Studies Review, 24 2/3 (1981).

could be initiated to help create them. At the level of state apparatuses, manpower training programmes were recommended for administrators and a strong political order as the appropriate context in which administration would itself become effective in undertaking modernization tasks.

If government was to be judged by what it did, then it had to have the capacity for performing the tasks necessary for attaining certain set goals. In *Political Order in Changing Societies*[1], Samuel Huntington put a case against democracy in these societies. If their governments were committed to attaining certain developmental goals, then they could not afford to be stable as well as democratic. Democracy requires that people participate openly in the process of government, that their preferences for public policies be taken into account by those who govern, that those who govern derive their power from the governed, that they maintain a system of communication with the governed and that they be periodically ready to account for their activities and either be recalled from office or be returned depending on the verdict of the governed. This implies that the governors have the authority and capacity to transform the preferences of the governed into policies which will satisfy these preferences. Where this is not possible, it further implies that the governors can explain and justify their decisions, and such explanations and justifications will be accepted by the governed.

Huntington, however, argued that in developing societies, political systems operate in very fragile environments where the legitimacy of governmental decisions and non-decisions are seen in zero-sum ways. Thus, when a certain demand is made and it is not met, it does not matter what explanation the government makes: those affected will not just be satisfied. Moreover, given that major developmental goals require substantial resources and that these resources are themselves scarce, the government must limit the kinds of demands made on it so as to avoid the risk of loosing legitimacy by failing to meet too many demands. The more it loses authority and legitimacy, the more likely that its power may be challenged by rival elites within the societal environment. Given that the goal of every government is to survive before meeting any societal demands, it follows that governments in developing countries need to shun democracy; under conditions of a changing society, democracy is a source of political decay rather than political development.

It is within this kind of framework of argument that states in developing countries have preferred to be preoccupied with the politics of control rather than with the promotion of political participation. By perfecting the instruments of control, governments find that they do not only carefully select the kinds of demands made on them, but they can also establish the criteria of legitimation without running the risk of an open public challenge. Thus any form of popular participation in the process of government is usually in the

1 S. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

form of approval of governmental actions and programmes rather than expression of diverse interests expecting governmental decisions and actions.

It has, however, been argued that this kind of political culture develops not because governing elites want to satisfy certain developmental goals; on the contrary, such a culture of preferring control over participation becomes prevalent because governing elites have chosen to privatize the state and personalize political power so as to meet their very narrow and private needs over and above any public good. If this were not the case, then the balance sheet of development in Africa would not be so miserable after a quarter of a century of independence. The premises on which Huntington seemed to justify the shunning of democracy in developing countries are therefore found wanting.

Frantz Fanon[1] was the first to make this observation. In his view, African governments started to sideline democracy soon after independence because the governing elites could not afford to be accountable as well as do what they were doing with state power. The state, as it were, became a means for private accumulation of both wealth and power, and this was quite often done irrespective of how much it hurt the public good. In his famous chapter on The Pitfalls of National Consciousness, Fanon gave a detailed political sociology of this new ruling class in Africa, and damned it for being selfish, anti-people, unimaginative, unfit to rule and part of the problem of underdevelopment and not its solution. Thus, by state institutions - including the monolithic political parties - keeping the people away from the political arena, there was no service done to political development, i.e. the institutionalization of processes of government that would competently manage and resolve social conflicts. If anything, by the politics of control, such conflicts were merely buried underground and had the potential of bursting out in anomic and uncontrollable fashions. These non-participatory single-partly or no-party systems of government were, therefore, by their very nature, unstable.

Another interesting thesis was later advanced by Abdulrahman Mohammed Babu in a postscript to Walter Rodney's How Europe Underdeveloped Africa[2]. Babu observed that the politics of control leads many African civilian governments to be commandist, i.e. to prefer issuing commands so as to be obeyed rather than engaging in discussions so as to convince. Very soon, a culture of fear becomes prevalent in the political system such that, even when things are going wrong, nobody dares point it out since only the commander has the right and the knowledge to know what is wrong. In this regard, the commander is usually the Head of State. A point comes, however, when those who are more qualified to command - the army - find that they can no longer allow their role to be usurped by the Head of State, and

1 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1963).

2 W. Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Dar-es-Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972).

they hence decide to step in his shoes. To Babu, the politics of control - or command - more than anything else was the root cause of military coups d'etat in Africa. Once more, the lack of a participatory political culture, rather than nurture political stability, is here argued to be the source of political instability.

We ourselves have argued that one of the prime causes of military coups d'etat in Africa is political discontent in an atmosphere of political repression[1]. When the popular masses, after having been highly mobilized during the period of the struggle for political independence are suddenly demobilized as channels of participation are closed on them; when, as a result of this demobilization, public accountability becomes more and more difficult to sustain and power-holders profit from the situation by flagrantly continuing to use their public offices for private gain; when all this happens, sooner or later a part of the elite, which feels left out from political power and hence from personal enrichment, is bound to exploit the discontent in society and precipitate a military coup. This is particularly easy since the backbone of government, i.e. the instruments of control, lie, in the final analysis, with the military.

Men in uniform, like civilians who occupy state bureaucracies, are part and parcel of the modern political elite in an African state. When politics becomes organized along ethnic lines as part and parcel of the control mechanisms, they cannot help but be drawn into the ethnic conflicts that follow. When an incumbent regime begins rigidly to control the entry into positions of power as part of the control mechanism, men in uniform will be equally affected or they may begin to sympathize and empathize with their cohorts who are adversely affected. When a President begins to trust only his family, clan or tribe with responsibility as a way of maintaining tight control of the system, this is bound, at one time or another, to anger certain sections of the army and to alienate them from the system. When, finally, there no longer exists legal ways of entering into positions of power and seeking changes in government, and the army is itself mistrusted by the regime, then men in uniform are very likely to band together in defence of their corporate interests and bid for political power themselves. But such a takeover in the interest of the army 'as a caste' can only be successful if it is synchronized with popular demand or potential popular support for a military coup.

We may therefore postulate that, whenever a regime has alienated popular support and has closed legal channels for a change of government, and if the army has corporate interest to take over power or part of its entertains such interest, a coup will be precipitated whenever the army senses that the constituency of discontent is big enough to give it immediate and spontaneous support. If this support is forthcoming, it will give the army the assurance to broaden its governing coalition and reach out to the civilian population. But if, after taking over, the army notices that popular support is not forthcoming and

1 Anyang' Nyong'o Military Intervention.

there are differences within the army regarding their corporate interest, the coup makers are very likely to withdraw into themselves, become military oriented and seek to solve their problems by force and the institution of a praetorian and personal dictatorship. Again control, rather than participation, becomes the dominant political culture of military rule. And, once more, the system becomes brittle and inherently unstable.

Whether a coup is popular or not, once it occurs, it has the tendency to create a political culture whereby elites competing for positions of political power always see the coup as a means of resolving their conflicts. Even when civilian rule is restored, as has happened in Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda, political crises are likely to be solved more by the coup d'etat than by rational-legal methods. The blame should not, however, be put at the doorstep of coup makers: the blame must go primarily to the first governments which instituted non-participatory systems of government and thus destroyed the culture of pluralist political participation, i.e. democracy.

Democracy and Stability

We see, therefore, that the arguments that were given against participatory democracy have not been born out by history. It was assumed that, with less stress on the political system as a result of less demands on it, more developmental goals would be achieved. But the history of Africa over the last twenty five years show more and more underdevelopment especially in political systems which are least participatory. A quick casual look will reveal that the more participatory political systems have done much better in terms of economic growth than the less participatory ones: Kenya under Kenyatta as compared to Sudan under Nimeiri: Côte d'Ivoire under Houphouet Boigny as compared to Zaire under Mobutu. The comparison is not altogether perfect: one does not know, for example, what to do with Malawi in this scheme of comparisons. That notwithstanding, there is very little evidence that Africa has been better off in terms of economic growth and development because governments have no had to be bothered by popular pressures. It is more the case that governments have done whatever the wanted to do and ruined economies precisely because they have not been held accountable for their actions by those they govern.

Mahmood Mamdani[1] has recently argued that even when the bourgeoisie put the question of democracy on the agenda of African politics an assert that a democratic political culture is the only sure source of political stability, they do so in very narrow terms. Democracy is seen purely and simply in terms of bourgeois competitive politics: free and fair elections. But who, in Africa, can participate freely and fairly in electoral politics? Are we not here talking mainly of those social classes which are free from the extra-economic coercion

1 Mahmood Mamdani, Contradictory Class Perspectives on the Question of Democracy: the Case of Uganda, in Anyang' Nyong'o, (ed.) Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa.

that the state puts on them so as to perpetuate certain forms of exploitation not necessarily affected by free and fair elections?

If Democracy is to be an activity of meaning to all classes in society, argues Mamdani, and in particular to the popular classes, then its form and scope must indeed be meaningfully related to the living conditions of these same classes[1]. What, in effect, dopes Mamdani mean?

It is a self-evident fact that the majority of people in Africa are peasants that derive their livelihood from small-holding agriculture in the countryside. Very often, the prices of both the agricultural produce marketed locally and those sold abroad as exports are set by the state. If the state does not buy these produce from the peasants directly through marketing boards, then it does so through the aegis of traders who are usually part and parcel of the bourgeoisie. Further, the trade in other commodities, e.g. wage goods, which are sold in the rural areas to the peasantry, are handled by this bourgeoisie given state licenses to do so. Again it is the state which controls prices and which determines the exchange relations between consumers and the traders. But the issue of prices is secondary to a much more fundamental issue: that of production and the conditions under which the peasants reproduce their lives. Very rarely would one except that the issues, very crucial to the interests of the popular masses, would provide the subject-matter of democratic debate. If anything, the bourgeoisie, *imposing politics from above,* see democracy merely in terms of its *form* as intra-bourgeois competition for political power. That is why multi-party politics - the form - and not popular policies - the content - is usually the view of democracy that the bourgeoisie adopts in challenging military rule. In Latin America, the bourgeoisie prefers to adopt the strategy of 'pactology' or 'concertation'. This is a process whereby the bourgeoisie negotiates with the military to give up power and accept a democratic process of electing a government. Pactology, in essence, is simply a restoration of the political unity of the bourgeoisie previously disrupted by the coup. It is also aimed at limiting the political agenda through consensus bargaining and isolating those who are regarded by the bourgeoisie as a threat to the rules of the game. The consequence, of course, is that once the bourgeoisie forms a government and continues using state power to carry out the same types of policies as it has previously done - as happened under Obote II in Uganda - the popular masses soon begin to express discontent with it precisely because such changes do not affect the relations of production in society, and once more a rival faction may precipitate a coup exploiting this same constituency of discontent.

Democracy, viewed as free and fair elections in strictly bourgeois terms, is not therefore an answer to Africa's problems of political instability. The history of Nigeria since independence clearly attests to this. At no time, following the several changes that have occurred from military rule to civilian and back to

1 Mamdani, Ibid.

military again, have the Nigerian bourgeoisie thought it necessary to give more content to the democratic process and involve the popular masses in politics from below.

Following from Mamdani's arguments, Samir Amin[1] notes that it is perhaps impossible to expect contemporary ruling classes in Africa to open themselves up to democratic politics. The absence of any economic life autonomous in relation to state power, and the concomitant absence of any autonomy of expression on the part of social forces in relation to this power, renders any talk of democracy meaningless, for democracy is truly impossible in these conditions[2]. Again Fanon keeps asserting himself: if the state is seen mainly in terms of access to power and wealth, and if occupying any state position guarantees this access, and if there is intense competition among the elite for access to these positions, then it follows that a democratic process will jeopardize the security of those already in political power. Those who have the means to challenge this power, e.g. through private business, will also not be tolerated by the power-wielders. If any individual has to be successful in business, then he must do so under the patronage, or in alliance with, those in positions of political power. Governments in Africa are hence not at all tolerant of national 'private enterprise': they see in enrichment outside their control a threat to their own stability[3].

Yet the frustration of private initiatives among nationals does not really lead to the stability of these regimes. If anything, it leads to a false sense of security among those who govern. They begin to create space in business for immigrant business communities' and foreign capital in an atmosphere where indigenous businessmen are very much aware of what they can achieve and hence what they are missing. In Senegal and Sierra Leone, the immigrant business communities would be Lebanese: in East Africa they would be Asian. In either case such immigrant business communities, though they be given space in the private sector by the government because they pose no political threat, very soon realize that their investments might not be safe in the event of a political change which brings into power that faction of the bourgeoisie whose interests have been hurt by their presence in the economy. The tendency among such immigrant businessmen is therefore to invest abroad or to enter into business ventures which do not really tie them down. The end result is that they are always vulnerable to being accused of exploitation, mercenary behaviour, etc. They are thus a source of diverting the popular masses from the real issues of underdevelopment and the major political contradictions in society. And when crises occur, the state often finds itself unable to solve such crises in favour of the bourgeoisie as a whole since the bourgeoisie is so

1 Samir Amin, Preface: The State and the Question of 'Development' in Anyang' Nyong'o, Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa.
2 Amin, Preface, p.3.
3 Ibid.

fractionalized, ans do divided in their relationship to the state that it is not inconceivable that some factions quite often favour the falling apart of the state as a condition of their own re-emergence into a state they themselves will dominate.

Popular Movements and the State: The Future of Democracy in Africa

Whatever is going on in Africa at the level of the politics of the bourgeoisie, one other tendency can be observed: the various attempts by the popular masses to challenge the post-colonial states from below. Both Nzongola-Ntalaja[1] and Wamba-dia-Wamba[2] characterize these challenges as movements for a second independence in Africa. the popular masses, having realized that independence has not brought much change to their lives, and noting that political power is a daily menace in their lives, have, in certain societies, taken the initiative into their own hands and sought to establish their own independence. Perhaps the most dramatic case where people have taken such initiatives on a popular basis and gotten rid of a repressive regime is the recent triumph of the National Resistance Movement in Uganda[3]. But even here, though the NRA succeeded in forming a government and started to organize society politically in a new way, certain cautionary remarks that we get from both Wamba and Nzongola in their analysis of movements for a second independence are necessary here if we are to be in a position to predict what might happen in Uganda and to other movements with less glamorous histories.

First, such movements usually begin in areas that are isolated from the centers of power and where access by government forces is difficult. They are usually led by educated people who can articulate the grievances of the masses into political programmes that they can communicate to the outside world. Because the masses are so alienated from the government, and since they are, in reality, looking for an alternative social setting to feel at home, they will very readily begin to follow the ideas, principles and myths of such leaders. Quite often, if such leaders are not themselves sincerely committed to democratic politics, or are, in the process of struggle, not ready to allow a democratic culture to develop from below, such movements may end up being merely popular in form and not popular in content. Commitment to the cult of the leader may easily replace the development of a democratic culture of struggle among the people. It is this culture which, if fully developed, would make a difference to the form of government that the movement would put into place when it eventually captures state power.

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1 Nzongola-Ntalaja, The Second Independence Movement in Congo-Kinshasa, in Anyang' Nyong'o (ed.) Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa.

2 E. Wamba-dia-Wamba, The Experience of Struggle in the People's Republic of Congo, in Anyang' Nyong'o, Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa.

3 See, for example Mahmood Mamdani, NRA/NRM: Two Years in Power (Kampala: Progressive Publishing House, 1988).

Second, such movements may quite often be faced with hazards and tasks they cannot really perform or overcome. Yet, in order to survive as movements, they must try to create and perpetuate the myth of invincibility. Very often such myths may lead to tremendous losses of lives in battle against more superior forces of the state. The fact of defending a popular cause among the people is no substitute for real preparedness to go to war against an army that is armed to the teeth. Yet very often lives are lost by such popular movements and state armies are blamed for it when it is quite clear that the popular movements had also been engaged in some kind of adventurism.

Thirdly, there does seem to emerge the veneration of armed struggle as an equivalent of liberation. When people are genuinely dissatisfied with their governments, it is becoming popular within the left in Africa that taking up arms and waging and armed struggle (or simply fighting in the bush) is the most progressive stand to take. It is quite clear, given the experience under Ronald Reagan, that even the right can arm and finance their own liberators: armed struggle is no longer a monopoly of the left. The essence of this argument is that the mere taking up of arms is no indication that a movement is either popular or that it is fighting to advance a more superior moral cause than those who govern. it is not the act of armed struggle which is important; much more vital to the interests of the popular masses and the cause of democracy in Africa is the politics of armed struggle.

Finally, as the political crisis becomes even more acute in Africa, we must expect popular rebellion against incumbent regimes to take many forms. Thus popular movements or alliances for democracy will appear in a variety of organizational forms: student movements, trade unions, churches, burial societies, etc[1]. Attention to these popular movements is critical in trying to understand the struggle for democracy in Africa and the strategies the popular masses are adopting, in different circumstances, to challenge the post-colonial state from below. And since these movements come from below, from the belly of society as it were, their goals and demands must necessarily spell the content of democracy from the point of view of the popular masses. That is the future as they see it: and that is the future that the state as it is constituted will either try to avoid or somehow give way to.

State, Democracy and Foreign Powers

We cannot conclude our discussion of the prospects for democracy in Africa if we do not mention something about foreign powers and the prospects for democracy in Africa. We are not doing this simply as a matter of ritual, we are doing it primarily because Africa's current predicament is intricately intertwined with the interests and machinations of foreign powers. Sometimes it is argued that the independent states have a lot of room for manoeuvre vis-a-vis foreign powers, and that on many domestic issues, such as how to

1 CODESRIA research project on Social Movements, Social Transformation and the Struggle for Democracy in Africa, (Dakar, Senegal).

organize their domestic politics, foreign powers have very little say. It is equally forcefully argued that, by their very nature as dependent societies, governments or states in the African setting cannot be that independent of their foreign master. On many important domestic issues, such as what type of political system to nurture, they are very directly dependent on what the foreign powers they depend on prefer.

The pros and cons of these two schools of thought need not detain us here for too long. Let us accept, as a matter of common sense, that both sides are right in their general observations but wrong if these statements are taken to be categoric and zero-sum assertions. Over the day-to-day running of political affairs, independent states in Africa, including the Republic of South Africa, have a certain amount of autonomy from foreign powers. But in matters that concern the long-term interests of these powers, these states are highly dependent on, and subordinate to, foreign powers. The case of Nicaragua illustrates this point very clearly, so does the case of Chile in 1970-73 and Zimbabwe just before the independence settlement. We shall briefly analyze what happened in these countries so as to lay the ground for what is happening in Africa with regard to the struggles for democracy and the various interests of foreign powers.

(i) Chile

When the Popular Unity Government took over power in Chile in 1970 under its socialist President, Salvador Allende, Washington was not pleased. The government of the United States of America immediately went into action to try and destabilise Allende's regime. Allende's biggest challenge to Washington was that he was trying, and perhaps succeeding, to implement a socialist revolution through the democratic process[1]. His policies, given time, were likely to build a solid popular support for the regime, thus giving Allende the power and the legitimacy to expropriate U.S. multinationals in Chile[2]. The U.S. government therefore decided to plant seeds of discord in the Chilean political process so as to create opposition to Allende before he could entrench the Popular Unity policies into the fabrics of society. When using the normal political process failed, the CIA resorted to sabotage activities and the coup d'etat, finally intervened to crush the Popular Unity Movement.

1 See Philip J. O'Brien, Chile: Protest and Repression, in Third World Affairs, 1986.

2 These MNGs, R. Jenkins has argued, developed over time their internal support classes in Latin America which changed the morphology of Latin American politics. The internationalization of productive capital and penetration of the Latin American market by Mngs, produced a series of strains not only at the level of the economy but also politically, as both populist and old conservative alliances began to crumble. In Chile, the growing power of the working class organized into trade unions threatened the hold that bourgeois democracy had had in society. When Allende put together a broad alliance of popular democratic forces, the old conservative bourgeois alliances refused to accept the new democracy and appealed to the soldiers for salvation. See also R. Jenkins, Transnational Corporations and Industrial Transformation in Latin America, (London: Macmillan, 1984).

Prior to the coup, the CIA had formed two types of opposition to Allende: ideological propaganda from the opposition parties calling for the eradication of Marxism as something alien to Chile and strike activities either by certain trade unions or special interest groups. When the CIA saw that the ideological propaganda was not getting very far, it intensified its efforts to bride unions to strike so as to precipitate an economic crisis. Just before the army struck, truck drivers, paid to do so by the CIA, staged a general strike which paralyzed internal trade, particularly the transportation of commodities into Santiago, the major city. This was enough to heighten the demand by opposition parties that allende could not govern, hence needed to resign. The military quickly moved in despite the tremendous opposition from Allende's supporters. The period following the coup d'etat saw stiff opposition from the Popular Unity forces meet intense repression by the military in its attempt to establish itself in power.

Thousands and thousands of lives have been lost in Chile since then. What comes out very clearly is that, though more and more Chileans have come to oppose Pinochet's government - including the Christian Democrats who gave him tactical support originally - the US government has not done anything serious to overthrow Pinochet. The struggle to restore democracy in Chile has been left purely to the Chileans while the support to the regime that did away with democracy still continues to come from Washington.

(ii) Nicaragua

The overthrown of the old dictatorship in Nicaragua by the Sandinistas in 1980 was expected in Washington. But the US government also expected to influence the trend of events and to ascertain that it had a hold on the new government. When the Sandinista Directorate veered away from Washington and declared its intention to move towards socialism in Nicaragua, Washington felt that it had to take the offensive and bring the Sandinista government down, much in the same way by which Allende had been brought down. Perhaps as a result of the Chilean lesson, the Sandinista regime took much better precautions than the Popular Unity government had. Moreover, Nicaragua was much more of a political nuisance to Washington than an economic prize, hence the stakes were not as high for the US as they had been in Chile.

But Ronald Reagan, following what he did in Grenada, had made it a burning mission to bring the Sandinistas to their heels. The states in Central America, led by Mexico and Costa Rica, have striven to stop the US from militarily intervening in Nicaragua while pressurizing Nicaragua to eliminate some of the major contradictions in its own political process that have been giving the US the excuse to intervene. Thus, as a result of these pressures from without - one domestic to Central American politics and the other coming from the US - Nicaragua has had to move towards a much more pluralistic political system by making a rapprochement with the contras.

(iii) Zimbabwe

During the discussions for Zimbabwean independence in Lancaster House in London in 1980, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) - Patriotic Front led by Robert Gabriel Mugabe was refusing to concede to some of the major clauses in the independence constitution favouring British and white settler (Rhodesian) interests. At one point, it looked as if the talks were going to break down, and no independence settlement would be arrived at. This could only mean that the guerrillas would continue fighting, Britain would still be faced with the difficult task of governing a colony militarily and nobody would tell how far the fighting would continue to escalate in the volatile region of Southern Africa. Having been shown that their opponents were eager for a settlement, the guerrilla forces were in an optimistic mood, and Britain was not just about to let them exploit this mood militarily by returning to the bush because the talks had broken down[1].

Mozambique, having had the responsibility of giving sanctuary to the ZANU freedom fighters, had received quite a bashing from the Rhodesian and South African forces. As a result, Mozambique's economy was in tatters. South African went further to forment an internal rebellion against the FRELIMO government using the Mozambican National Resistance Movement (RENAMO - its acronym in Portuguese). FRELIMO calculated that, with an independence settlement in Zimbabwe, less military pressure would come from that front, and Mozambique would have a better chance to sort out the RENAMO menace.

When ZANU-PF was becoming difficult, Britain thought of no better stick to use against Mugabe than his friend Samora Michel, the Mozambican President. The British delegation therefore put it to Mozambique that pressure was needed on Mugabe to agree to the independence accords. In return, Britain would not only give Mozambique the necessary aid in the post-settlement period, but she would also effectively contribute towards a peace process within the region. Samora Michel obliged and, rather than board the place back to Maputo with no independence settlement in his pocket and ready to fight further, Mugabe went back to the conference hall and signed the accords.

Role of Foreign Powers in the Democratization Process

We have told the above three stories to illustrate one important point: the importance of foreign powers which have interests in particular third world countries in determining or shaping the political processes in these societies. At very crucial moments, using the internal contradictions or the regional geopolitics in these countries, these foreign powers can intervene to significantly shape the political future of these countries. It does not follow, however, that the political forces in these societies must always give themselves

1 See Ibbo Mandaza, (ed.), Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition (Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series, 1987).

up to be manipulated, threatened and successfully forced to adopt certain political initiatives favouring the interests of foreign powers and going against their own. In the case of Chile, it can be said that the Popular Unity government did its best to organize a popular democratic force in defence of its policies for transition to socialism. It was the sheer might of the dollar, the gullibility of the Chilean military and the opportunism of the opposition parties which let Allende down. At the same time, Allende has been accused of not having taken heed to change the military leadership to make sure that the armed apparatuses of the state were supportive of his policies. This, perhaps, is a fair critique; it also points to the very vital fact that any move to democratize society that does not involve the democratization of the organs of state power jeopardizes the success of such a move.

The difference between Nicaragua and Chile is therefore obvious. In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas took over power after vanquishing the National Guard and completely getting rid of the armed apparatus of the state of the ancien regime. The Sandinista state was, for all intents and purposes, from Masaya to Monagua and other principal centers of government, a Sandinista state. Allende was attempting a much more difficult task: the task of trying to democratize a state that was, by its very nature, still very much part, and supportive of, the ancien regime and its foreign backers.

But the Sandinistas had another problem which, somehow, they share with the ZANU-PF. This is the problem of a popular movement taking over state power in an environment where diverse sections of the popular masses have not yet, for various historical reasons, become part of the movement. And precisely because they are not part of the movement, they can be mobilized by opposing social forces to resist integration into the movement. In the case of Nicaragua the Miscito Indians fell into this category; in Zimbabwean case the Ndebele of Matabeleland are a case in point. In both cases, neither the Sandinistas nor ZANU-PF had a clear and constructive democratic line in dealing with the Miscito and Ndebele resistance to their rule. Rather than seek to understand the points of view of both groups from within, both the Sandinistas and the ZANU-PF adopted the attitude that revolutionary leadership is like missionary work: the leaders are correct and those who do not follow must be converted into believers by being compelled - with the threat of going to hell if they do not convert - to abandon their sinful ways. A much more constructive approach would have been that o building a broad democratic front among the popular masses. The front would, no doubt, accept and tolerate political differences without sacrificing commitment to democracy and delinking from the old society. It is this approach, more difficult to pursue than is the case with missionary - like revolution, which has eluded most so-called progressive political movements in Africa and Latin America - quite often turning them into 'left wing' dictatorships and anti-democratic regimes.

Conclusion

Any foreign power, bent on frustrating a progressive movement which has taken over state power so as to undertake a thoroughgoing revolutionary change in society, would find it much easier to exploit internal contradictions than to nakedly impose its will on such a movement. Non-democratic politics are sure ways of creating pockets of discontent and temptations to ally with external forces by such constituencies of discontent so as to subvert attempts to build a new democratic social order. It is therefore antithetical to the goals of a progressive movement to advocate the politics of control rather than the politics of participation. A movement cannot fight to build a democratic society when, in its own politics, it does not practise democracy. Democracy cannot, in other words, be brewed like a cup of instant coffee: it has to be built by social practice and traditions that run deep into the like of civil society.