

Transitions to Democracy in Africa**التحول الديمقراطي في إفريقيا****Nouri Doumi ***

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In this essay, I have attempted to address the normative question of the pathways to and prospects for transitions to democracy in Africa. As indicated from the reflections upon my analysis detailed in the two sections, if I choose to summarily answer such a question from any one of the perspectives on offer, it could only result in the banal pronouncement of the self-evident. Transitions to democracy, I have argued, cannot be understood solely in the language of one trajectory or the other, and there are neither key defining attributes of the prospects for democracy in Africa nor template solutions.

Keywords: Transition, Democracy, Africa, Election, Monitoring.**ملخص:**

تعتبر مسيرة التحول الديمقراطي في إفريقيا واحدة من أبرز الظواهر السياسية التي شهدتها القارة في العقود الأخيرة. وقد شهدت هذه المسيرة صعوداً وهبوطاً، وتباينت وتيرتها ونتائجها من دولة إلى أخرى. إن فهم أسباب هذا التحول، والعوامل المؤثرة فيه، والتحديات التي تواجهه، يكتسب أهمية بالغة لتقييم مستقبل الديمقراطية في القارة، ولتقديم توصيات عملية لدعم هذا التحول.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحول الديمقراطي؛ إفريقيا؛ الرقابة؛ الانتخابات.

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Introduction

The issue of governance and democratic transition is one of the key challenges facing post-colonial Africa. The pre-colonial administration was in most cases hierarchical and authoritarian. This makes the transition to democracy much more challenging in Africa, mainly because democracy in the African context has to assume a peculiar and unique character, which is different from that of any other geopolitical region of the world. In this piece of work, first, the nature, history, and origination of democracy in Africa will be examined. Second, the different strategies of democratization in Africa and the factors promoting and hindering this process in African countries will be identified. Finally, the piece of work will outline the main ways in which international actors have intervened in the political transition process in Africa.

Democracy is a system of government in which power is vested in the people, who rule either directly or through freely elected representatives. Democracy is regarded as the best form of government primarily because it is meant to benefit as many people as possible. Scholars and policymakers point to the rich potential that liberal democracy has as a peace-enhancing system in multiethnic societies. Control over government ensures that its citizens are protected from the abuse or misuse of power by elites. Political, economic, and social empowerment and the broadening of human rights, particularly the right to participate in the decision-making of government, can be a stabilizing force for states. Retaining democratically elected leaders can also ensure their greater legitimacy and respect, even when disputing states face intricate security threats. While democracy has emerged as the quality system of governance, the transition from various forms of devolved administration to democracy has been neither easy nor smooth, not even in African societies.

1. Definition of Democracy

SUMMARY: The following subsection contributes to the literature on transitions to democracy in Africa. It features explanations of theories of democracy, particularly liberal and participatory interpretations. It argues that both offer different criteria for evaluating a political regime's democratic character. As such, definitions of democracy must consider diverse ways of viewing political institutions. The analysis addresses the theoretical literature concerning democracy, particularly contestations over the meaning of the term and the theories emanating from these different conceptualizations. It also elaborates on cycles and alternative democratic models based on direct democracy and the notion of consociative democracy. The section also features the usual definition of key dimensions of democracy in terms of the electoral,

liberal, and participatory components of democratic governance. It also includes a discussion of two concepts of overlapping consensus.¹

Democracy is one of the most contested terms in the social sciences. It can be interpreted as representing the will of the majority with reference to majority rule, or as a decision-making process whereby all or the majority of citizens participate in one way or another. From this view, the majority rule and the participatory perspectives are the roots of two different concepts of democracy, one being liberal and the other participatory. The first, which is usually called the elective or electoral model, views free and fair elections as a sufficient condition for characterizing a political regime as democratic. The participatory model, instead, places special stress on the necessity to root out exclusion through the practical exercise of political and civil rights. Arguably, these two interpretations offer criteria for evaluating the democratic character of a political regime. As such, the definition of democracy tends to reflect the major attractions of different ways of societal ordering. Democracy is then informed by wealth and practices within the multiple theories that coexist in people's chosen levels of societal ordering.²

There are several issues that have to be clarified. The first is whether or not one can find a definition of democracy that can apply to all societies, or whether instead there are different definitions depending on the various ways in which the matter is viewed. The second question concerns the possibility of finding a type of social order fitting according to its nature in all societies. Finally, there is a potential problem in defining democracy according to specific cultural as opposed to situational realities. The handling of such is important in the sense that certain models, for instance, have failed in the African context. Some people have called these models book democracies because they work in theory but in reality, they are nonviable. The story of democratic transitions in Africa is more complicated. Even in Africa, where a near civil war condition has occurred, elections have taken place and the winners are in power, evicting the losers. However, the notion of democracy prevailing in today's Africa is neither liberal nor participatory.³

2. Historical Context

African history demonstrates a strong influence from former colonial powers, and the historical background is often cited to explain why democratic transitions and consolidations are relatively fragile compared to other parts of the world. European colonization impacted the political history of many African countries in various ways. When arbitrary boundaries for European colonies were drawn in the 19th century, colonizers imposed their own intellectual ideas regarding the best type of governance on Africans' diverse

political systems. Some areas continued to be governed indirectly at the local level, while others largely represented the power of colonizers.⁴

Independence from colonial rule represented a moment of historical rupture in Africa. While it created opportunities for indigenous people to create institutions to impose their desires on their governments' actions and laws, independence also generated ethnic conflicts that undermined political authority. Colonial rulers often divided already existing African countries into two or more entities. Additionally, attitudes towards state power, even among the same people group, would vary due to the proximity of a group to the capital. Post-colonial Africa experienced a great struggle for power with coups and the enlargement of personal authoritarian regimes. Indeed, by 1960, which is regarded as the apex of the 'winds of democratization' era on the continent, other African countries such as Ghana had overthrown colonial governance for more than 100 years. The calling of the so-called national conference in Nigeria in the mid-1990s shows that ethnicities can negotiate without resorting to secession. It also demonstrates how, despite previous uneven colonial presence in Nigeria, being colonized by different nations, the call for indigenous national governance was represented. The long historical background of many African countries enables students to use historical archives, official statements, and footage to make contrasts and comparisons. Furthermore, the conference specifically investigates the historical background of a country to determine the development of democratic thoughts. For this reason, the course leader uses historical background as the first part of the lecture to provide a conceptual framework for the rational course.⁵

2.1. Colonial Legacy

Colonialism in Africa has left its imprint not only on economic, social, and ethnic structures, but notably on political systems as well. In fact, virtually all African states and societies are post-colonial entities in the sense that they were, in most cases rather instantly, shifted from a governance model of extensive consultation to one of direct rule from above by a foreign power. Colonial rule was therefore disruptive to traditional systems of governance and power relations. The colonial state was not established with the intention of developing democratic governance structures. However, elements of the alien Western political culture were accidental results of the administratively convenient imposition of a foreign political model already in place at home. The dialectic in nationalist movements, on the one hand adopting Western values and institutions, and on the other, rejecting foreign systems and supporting the reinstatement of local ones, reveals the dilemmas of the foreign imposition.⁶

This imposed colonial model, disruptively inserted into Africa, thus decisively shaped political dynamics on the continent. The colonial state, not prepared to acknowledge other legitimate centers of power than its own, effectively undermined the indigenous structures of authority in place before the arrival of colonialism. Furthermore, various tasks of resource exploitation – diamond and gold mining, cocoa, palm oil, timber, and rubber extraction as well as worker recruitment procedures for settler colonies – subjected the populations in these territories to particular forms of exploitation and compulsion by colonial powers. Colonial exploitation has thus not only had a profound effect on the level of economic development between countries, but also brought about economic and social inequality within many of the successor territories. A most significant secondary effect of colonial rule is visible in the fields of formal and non-formal education. Colonial administrators established a system in which educated Africans could assist them in running the colonial state, thereby reinforcing the gulf between the educated and the non-educated, and contributing to the rise of an African elite, which, as an auxiliary arm for colonial power, effectively disrupted sociopolitical dynamics between this elite, local non-elite, and colonial administrators.⁷

In essence, then, even though colonial rule disrupted traditional political structures, it did not erase them. Analyses of comparative case studies of selected African states have examined the continuity and interaction between the colonial state and civil society, revealing the ways in which post-independent leaders have conflicted with both local and international society, once the colonial administration was no longer able to compel compliance. In the phase of post-colonial state formation, African politicians, accustomed to authoritarian colonial rule and imbued with values and ideology that accompanied the colonial heritage, found it both easy and natural to establish or reinforce authoritarian regimes and systems of clientelism in the freedom from restrictions hitherto set up by the colonial state. The implantation of democratic values, where these existed at all, was hampered by the deliberate confusion contained in a colonial heritage which, on the one hand, upheld a state bureaucracy insensitive and callous in relation to the indigenous population, and which, on the other, was developmentally committed to these very same populaces. Understanding the impact of time and space on paths to democratic governance of African governments, then, must begin with an appreciation of the various colonial legacies that offer antithesis rather than a springboard to notions of participatory democracy.⁸

3. Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical foundation is a critical and potent tool in exploring Africa's highly complex and dynamic processes of democratic transition. A

central aspect of understanding the field of democracy, and of this dissertation, is the employment of theoretical frameworks in the understanding of democracy. Theories can be understood as critical lenses that offer different emphases and key questions on selected phenomena. This dissertation utilizes the wide range of theoretical frameworks formulated in the study of democracy as a concept with near-infinite valences and inter-subjective or intersubjective signification. The theoretical aspect of democracy opens up various analyses that offer a critical or particularistic focus on a broad range of criteria for understanding democracy. There are a considerable number of theories that can provide a critical impulse in the study of democracy, such as measuring democracy against the norm of political stability, economic development, political history, power and participation, or institutional frameworks. A critical comparison of the quantitative and qualitative theories will then provide one with a multi-dimensional view of democracy as a theoretical concept in Africa over time.⁹

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the field of democratization and literature review, we will first explore the dominant, mainstream paradigm or theories that provide a conceptual framework with which to better understand the dynamics of democratization within the African continent. The central focus here will be on modernization theory, which forms the core of liberal analysis in the study of African democratization, and slowly we will unpack its application and contribution within the field of African democratization. Following that, the chapter will seek to explicate the limitations of modernization theory and the complementary theories therein, and its limits in grappling with African democratic transitional processes. Finally, we will consider theories that challenge the broader understanding of African democratic transitions, and crucially how various theories are compartmentalized within indexed transitions to democracy as value-laden and culturally different and insuperable. This offers the reader a much larger narrative of democracy, both as a theoretical and practical concept, than merely the compartmentalized literature review.¹⁰

3.1. Modernization Theory

Modernization theory is a relevant framework when approaching the question of why and how democracy should develop in Africa to some extent. Its core idea is that societies will change by slowly becoming modern, and eventually democratization will follow partly because of these changes. Historical data supports this theory in a way, with some examples where gradual modernization occurred before a period of democratization, and cases of rapid industrialization when true democratization did not follow. According to modernization theory, democracy is essentially an outgrowth of

modernization by itself, as rural peasants gradually move to the city and simultaneously undergo social, structural, and personal changes that are thought to be democratic. The transition to a modern world economy is also linked to internal industrialization because an industry is easier to govern than a food-producing economy.¹¹

Most of the literature that opposes the modernization thesis in relation to Africa is econometric time series data showing little authentic or significant socio-economic generative or reciprocative forces in place. Modernization theory has been harshly criticized for being Eurocentric and orientalist. A great deal of the literature discussing modernization theory out of political science contends that social scientists in the West spend most of their time learning about the "Third World" rather than actually investigating it cognitively. One concern with comparative analysis over time is the potential role of the external environment in exerting influence on regions or societies. In one view, the world economy or balance of power may function as a given exogenous condition, affecting the evolution of modernizations. An essential implication is that democratization and industrialization will have a weaker connection in general in the more globalized Third World, including Africa. Globalization assists in greasing the skids for successful industrialization so that poor industrial policy will not necessarily stunt growth.¹²

4. Case Studies

This chapter uses some case studies to illustrate the complexity of and divergences in transitions to democracy. What is evident in the case studies is that some transitional processes have ultimately led to consolidating democratic institutions and practices, while disappointingly it is clear that several other countries are still facing great obstacles. Case studies of South Africa, Ivory Coast, Congo, Ethiopia, and Nigeria provide comparative and in-depth analyses of some of the varying experiences of democratization. Despite the significant differences, we can, of course, also observe that there are some recurring themes across the case studies in terms of both historical, cultural, socio-economic, political, and international dimensions of the difficulties and challenges in the transitions and struggle for democracy and democratization in Africa. South Africa's journey is so far the only African experience of a transition from a deeply divided and violent society with exclusionary patterns of governance to a democratic, inclusive, and reconciliatory one. South Africa's passage to democracy has become one of the leading stories of the 'third wave' of democracy, but likewise also a story of unrivaled business success and unparalleled crime. Despite the noticeable successes, it is also true that the new democracy and the attempts to create stability and political institutions that reflect the social, cultural, regional, and linguistic dominance

of the people and societies in Africa still face severe questions in post-apartheid South Africa. The transitions to democracy in Ivory Coast, Congo, Ethiopia, and Nigeria have until recently been much less successful or even outright failures. In varying forms, these regimes still struggle with finding political solutions to the internal challenges of achieving democratic governance and peace and stability. However, even when discussing the countries above, it also provides the opportunity to see that problematic transitions can have some degree of success and have elements of both conflict avoidance and conflict resolution. The case studies also amplify the argument for a 'thick' understanding of the political transition and democratization in Africa, as discussed in the introduction to the book.¹³

4.1. South Africa

In discussing transitions to democracy in Africa, the case of South Africa serves as a focal point for understanding the attempted and seemingly successful transition following decades of apartheid and repressive governance. The first section of this case study provides an overview of key events that led up to the first democratic elections in 1994. We carefully chart the roles played by key figures in the move to democracy. The sociopolitical dynamics of the time are captured, including histories of struggle, patriotic unity at the time of transition, and the compromise forged.

The concept of transition as an ongoing process is evident in the stabilization and restructuring of key institutional frameworks. Voices of opposition have found space in the new democratic South Africa, whether within the political elite, in civic and social institutions, or perhaps more tellingly through the media. There are worrying signs that freedom of the media in South Africa is contracting as the state attempts to influence and control media content. The media have proven to be a powerful reflection of public opinion, acting as an active source of democratic energy and ultimately linking ethnically divided communities within South Africa and with the world. Independently produced and publicized truth, as well as the role of civil society organizations, served as an important counterweight to the propaganda of the day. However, the "good news" story of South Africa's democratic transition from apartheid can only be understood within the context of the era it purportedly replaced. Although political stability has been achieved since 1994, South Africa remains a turbulent society. Rape and corruption are rife, and murder rates are among the highest in the world. A deeply unequal society, not only economically but also politically, needs constructing and nurturing.¹⁴

5. Challenges and Obstacles

Ethnic diversity and the presence of multiple languages, religions, and cultural and social normative systems in most African countries are perceived

as an impelling force against the formation of a unified nation-state and explain why many states were unable to consolidate democratic governance. Post-independence containment of diversity has also been enlisted as an explanation for the persistence of authoritarianism. Three developments appear to account for the accommodative approaches advocated by African civil societies in this era. Firstly, African states are embracing or having imposed upon them liberal-democratic political norms and structures, albeit variously and, in some instances, only conceptually. Secondly, African countries cannot escape global imperatives to democratize and are obliged to respond to global political culture. Thirdly, African states are economically weak or failing, and democracy serves as a normative alternative to the totalitarian or benevolent autocratic rule that has hitherto failed to produce sustained economic and social growth.¹⁵

The interconnected assumptions presented above serve as the foundation for this paper. Yet, Africa remains overwhelmingly authoritarian. There are several reasons why it is difficult for societies to democratize. In presidential monopoly states of Africa, ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences have been instrumentalized in the enfranchisement of rulers and the continued marginalization of rivals. Struggles over state power and resources have resulted in prolonged conflict among regional and religious aggregates. National political parties and movements have failed to domesticate civil society through a cadre militancy imposed by force of arms. As the communities have fought for access to state power, class interest is presented within an ethnic and religious community prism. Political societies seeking to modernize African countries have a monopoly of coercive and legislative powers but have proposed political paths such as religious tolerance, linguistic and cultural pluralism, and even the devolution of power to encourage more visions of plural political societies. Ethnic and political competition entrenches itself in many African countries and has made it difficult for any single party or movement to consolidate power in the emergent African nations.¹⁶

5.1. Ethnic Conflict

In the African context, one of the greatest challenges to transitions to democracy is the social fabric – the social relationships and connections between members of a community or society. In its most damaging form, where communities are large and too diverse, where people feel suspicious or outright hateful toward each other, the resulting distrust and suspicion among members of the former society produce a constant crisis of governance. This subsection hypothesizes and analyzes the role and responsibilities of governance in creating unity among those parts of society where different communities or ethnicities live and interact.¹⁷

Many African countries consist, more or less, of ethnic, religious, and tribal divisions, and on occasion, these divisions sometimes erupt in severe conflict. The basis of the division might be territorial, or it might have resulted from the incompatible absorption of groups into the state and consciousness as Ethiopians, Eritreans, or Tigrayans – that is, through the invention of communities. Ultimately, the historical experiences of African states suggest that it is difficult, if not impossible, to create a truly multi-ethnic, democratic state, especially if the members of the communities remain deeply untrusting of each other. These deep-rooted antipathies are a result of specific events in the colonial history of the countries, including arbitrary border making that divided various peoples, a divide-and-rule style of administration that helped to distinguish between them, and historical treatment of particular groups as enemies. The political independence of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Sudan, for instance, saw large-scale disorder and even civil war when conflict between the nation's ethnic groups escalated.¹⁸

5.2. Role of Civil Society

Concepts have experienced democratic transition since the early 1990s, especially on the continent of Africa. One of the driving forces behind the demand for democratization processes is that strong civil society organizations have manifested a mobilization of citizens for political change for years. Civil society is also considered an effective support for the democratization process by facilitating the emergence of democratic values and providing a platform for active participation in public life. The relationship between civil society and the state has always raised issues, including the partnership towards conflict. There has been some written work about the role of civil society organizations in the democratization process, the nature of the position of influential NGOs, the attitude of the village courier, and others, the study of African informal groups and grassroots movements around the village, and the promotion of new land law in the area of gender relations. The study emphasized the role of the organization of the village community in the participation of poor and marginalized groups in decision-making processes.¹⁹

Civil society is basically a formation – in terms of organizational structures – of social life at various levels and includes various types of collective action: informal groups, formal associations, non-governmental organizations, professional and religious associations, issue-based organizations, and enabling environments that help to bolster available social capital and promote development, such as various forms of self-help groups and extended family or kinship units. Social movements, common interests, and tribally or ideologically based groups seek to express and articulate the needs and wants of their members at various levels of social life. Political

parties, which have a clear ideological orientation and are in opposition to the policies of the state, or are seeking to influence state policy for political, cultural, religious, economic, or other vested interests. All in all, what civil society strives to do is provide a platform for engaging in public participation and political activity in a manner that is acceptable to all. It is not a matter of challenging state policy but of ensuring that the concerns of marginalized and disempowered people in need of protection get a hearing, and that the poor and marginalized are enabled to defend their dignity, human rights, and interests without posing a threat to the established order and the status quo.²⁰

5.3. NGOs and Activist Groups

NGOs and activist groups have received the most attention from researchers and international supporters as key advocacy organizations that have a role in acting as agents of democratization. One of the most prominent roles that they play is the championing of "good governance" and democracy. Some groups also advocate for "development with empowerment" because they see political and civil rights as essential for the sustainability of development projects, leading to the growth of community-managed advocacy for change. In Africa and globally, evidence from the field shows that NGOs and activist groups play diverse roles. In particular, in a number of African countries, there has been a rise in the emergence of a multitude of non-governmental organizations that empower local communities with the aim of improving livelihoods by mainstreaming human rights, democracy, and social justice.²¹

Grassroots political mobilization empowers citizens who never considered themselves as constituting a collective aggrieved group at the receiving end of neoliberal policies by the state. Activist groups confirm that the state is not benign and it has smeared its "liberation credentials." The organized response of a coalition of NGOs and activist groups has stopped water privatization in their tracks. From both a community-led analysis and an activist group and sector point of view, peacebuilding has more of the root cause analysis or more of the peace with justice angle. The peace with justice perspective is advanced by trade union and non-governmental activists' groups and has been particularly important in peace conference processes. This section demonstrates the value of covering stories of how ordinary people have mobilized to try to change the society they live in and, in particular, restore social justice. Advocates for funds for civil society groups and activists strongly argue for capacity building and to give and confirm control to local partner-driven agendas. The historical context and current economic dynamics show that activist sectoral networks and individual CSOs have systemic and structural challenges to face in South Africa before they can begin to think

about reducing their over-dependence on international funding. Internationally, about 80% of the funds for NGOs outside North America and Western Europe are oriented towards food security. At home, these NGOs are highly committed to a structured dialogue with government and multi-stakeholder initiatives; only 7% of internationally registered NGOs are doing some thematic water work.²²

6. The Media

The media is an essential part of democratization and the liberal model of state-society relations. It has the power to shape public discourse. There is abundant normative writing about the possible contributions of a free and independent media to democracy, arguing that it can inform and involve citizens and thereby support government accountability and the promotion of the values of liberalism such as individualism, equality, justice, tolerance, and diversity. These few writers with reservations suggest that free media can contribute to democratization, but that the exact direction and nature of this contribution will be conditioned by the regime-media power relations prevailing in specific national or regional contexts, and by the specific intentions and behavior of different media organizations and political actors in these contexts.²³

A key role regularly ascribed to the media is the provision of information, and the opportunity for members of the public to question and debate this information, engage in civic action, and strive to make those in power act on this basis. It is conventional to divide the media into the traditional spheres of print, electronic, and broadcast media, and increasingly digital channels and related forms of professional or user-generated information distribution, such as digital news web portals or satirical and other political blogging. Nevertheless, it is warned that liberal democracy depends less on technical media performance than on the wider social and political context in which media are located. Democratic transitions in particular are often characterized by a complicated interaction between media, state, and civil society and the process of formal democratization.²⁴

6.1. Role in Democratization

Further still, the media takes the thirteenth place in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's list of fifteen gatekeepers in the democratization process, which also includes civil societies, political parties, the government, religious organizations, the judiciary, traditional institutions, trade unions, youth and women organizations, and multilateral and bilateral development agencies. These fifteen gatekeepers individually and collectively play important roles in the opening and closing of democratization processes. One advantage of the media is that it can rely on truth and accuracy, a game that all other gatekeepers

may not indulge themselves in. As a result, there are many areas in which the media has contributed, including, for example, peace in Senegal, conflict management in Mozambique, and the creation of historic civil societies in South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria. Many African professional journalists and grassroots media workers have also found themselves on the correct side of what many express.²⁵

Print journalists led the revolution for liberation and democratization in many African countries such as Kairaba in Gambia, Vanguard in Nigeria, Drum in South Africa, Daily Mail in Zimbabwe, Daily Mail and Times of Zambia, Dar es Salaam Guardian in Tanzania, and many others. It is well recorded how newspapers in South Africa argue and claim for a liberal democracy in the era of apartheid. Additionally, Angolan television and radio, Radio Mozambique, Radio Zambia, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, and other elite electronic media discuss freelance with the government, advocating for social justice based on equal access to resources, a sense of belonging, and the democratization of institutions. Also, in certain cases, some electronic media are considered speakers of democracy in Africa. In addition to these electronic media, recently, social networking sites are playing the same role during the 21st century revolution and its aftermath in Egypt, for example.²⁶

7. International Support and Intervention

7.1. The Role of International Organizations

International organizations sometimes play an important role in promoting and engaging in diplomatic activities intended to bring about a transition to a democratic regime in a country. This includes various regional bodies. They sometimes offer peacekeeping operations, and peacekeeping sometimes involves engagement in support of the construction of a democratic polity as part of the overall effort to stabilize the country. In addition, international organizations—both through their international diplomacy and their commitment to providing development assistance—sometimes encourage countries to improve their human rights records or provide development assistance to those countries that they see as making such an improvement.²⁷

There are various cases where international organizations attempted to remain neutral in the process of transition from dictatorship to democracy, or else to put in place democratic structures in a country hostile to the idea. International support for democratization can have a profound effect on the outcome of those conflicts in countries that are targeted by such international efforts. The support of so-called friendly countries can be a significant predictor of the extent to which local armed groups will accept any negotiated peace agreement. The level of external support from friendly states is a significant predictor of whether non-combatant populations would support or reject the

peace process, and also a significant determinant of the extent to which armed youth would join in a process to bring security to affected populations. International support can enhance the capabilities of national democratic institutions and also improve the effectiveness of external pressure. It can help to legitimize the switch to or maintenance of a peaceful process, and conversely, the withdrawal of international support and the imposition of sanctions and embargoes can have a significant and negative impact on the democratic process. Although international organizations are bound by the principle of non-intervention in the internal politics of a country, they play an essential role in the development of rules and norms in the international community. However, these bodies and individuals who shape the policies of these bodies have rarely put the fostering of democracy at the top of their list of priorities, nor are they willing to sacrifice other priorities in the pursuit of developing more democratic systems where they argue it is necessary to strike a balance between the principle of national sovereignty and the increasingly trusting relationship between states. The actual policy on how to create the right balance inevitably varies from situation to situation. Most accounts, therefore, stress the need for a contextual analysis. Despite their power, however, some scholars and many of the actors involved have sought a useful distinction between international actors and transnational actors. The key distinction here is thought to be the growing importance of transnational actors to carry the political discourse into areas of the world that are hard to reach. By employing networks of supporters and resources, they have been able to provide valuable support for local pro-democracy movements. However, they still operate in many parts of the world as parochial, foreign, and therefore 'un-African' informants, agitators, and threats, and there are very significant limits to the leverage that even they exert.²⁸

7.2. UN Peacekeeping Operations

Africa has been a battlefield of the Cold War during the 20th century. After the end of the colonial era, in several emerging states, social, ethnic, and other struggles for power resulted in violent conflicts. In this context, the United Nations decided to intervene in these parts of politically volatile areas on the African continent. In general, the objectives of UN peacekeeping missions during the period of political transformation were to contribute to the resolution of the actual conflict situations in the country, the protection and promotion of human rights of the population, establishing and maintaining the rule of law, and preparing the ground for the establishment of democratic governance, norms, and values. The methods included a diverse range of missions – peacekeeping, peace-support, observer, and humanitarian-type missions – taking into account the various backgrounds and competencies of the UN organization. Thus, the mandates of the peacekeeping missions, the

available mandate-related resources, and their application, as well as UN peacekeepers' conduct and behavior, were mission- and context-specific and not the result of a "one-size-fits-all" model.²⁹

In terms of the general effect of UN peace operations, that is, to support and promote stability and democratic governance, the effect of these interventions was rather weak. As the UN merely tried to stabilize war-torn countries and support the internal political processes – without any mandate from local and international actors – they were able to do at least a good job concerning the stabilization of political violence. The final success was again the outcome of the often complex interplay of international, national, and regional factors. In the end, liberal democracy is highly dependent on negotiations within and between the elite, local leaders, ethnic and social communities, and civil-war actors. Thus, the main characteristics of a successful peace practice are the acceptance or acknowledgment of the international community and the will of the local actors.³⁰

8. Economic Factors

Economic factors pervade the relationships between the political and economic systems in Africa. The question of the relationship between economic and political development is a complex one, and scholars have long debated the relative influence of one upon the other. Questions of economic development become especially significant in parts of the world, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, which contains large numbers of poor people in inadequately resourced and transcended states. Large segments of Africa's population live victimized by poverty and inequality, and this context shapes the prospects for democracy on the continent. Significantly, despite this abject poverty, countries like Congo and Angola, whose poverty should have lowered their prospects for democracy, became partly democratic in this period because of earnings from the export of primary products.³¹

Political scientists and economists debate whether resource wealth is systematically associated with more authoritarian regimes. However, these debates confuse two different issues. On the one hand, the income derived from natural resources itself; and, on the other hand, policies towards the nationalization, taxation, and legislation regarding the natural resources sectors are set by, associated with, and foster certain types of political regimes or changes in regime type. The capital-intensive character of much of the resource extraction and export sector means that, historically, European or North American firms have played a prominent role in the extractive sectors. Multinational mining and petroleum companies have a long and influential history in many less-developed countries, both during the colonial period and the post-colonial period. The additional investment and economic activity are

hoped for by government officials as well as firms, although it may also pose a challenge to local governance and government legitimacy as well as generate economic and cultural changes, which governance structures in African countries may not be well placed to address.³²

8.1. Impact of Globalization

Globally, African democracies are members of a technologically advanced world shaped by forces of trade, finance, technology, communication, and migration that have undermined the effective sovereignty of nation-states. The growth of a worldwide commercial entertainment industry that integrates local groups and international audiences, featuring a wide range of local cultural products, has not prevented the spread of a global cultural template. Most indigenous languages have contracted or even died out, and the survivors are often spoken in bizarre half-mixes with imported European words or American constructions. Yet the global is not culturally homogenizing, and it is usually possible to identify the nation-states, regions, and even ethnic regions that made contributions to the admixture, just as there have been African infusions into world culture. The digital economy is creating informational entrepreneurs with a transnationalist worldview, while nationalist ideologies focusing on national boundaries and small local businesses emphasize the erosion of local and national economic capacity to the profit of entirely rootless multinational corporations, greatly accelerated by the passage of the agenda.³³

African countries were affected by both the consent that citizens felt to their local rulers and attachment to their local institutions, as well as happenings beyond the border that directly changed their lives. Chiefs who became representative rulers and new men—young secondary school-educated people who developed state institutions—were affected by the global movements in the 1950s and 1960s. Around 1990, this global reach was even further enlarged through the international acronym for democracy as the only acceptable form of government, which every self-respecting nation-state had to affirm to be a full member of the family of nations, the new global value community. More practically, the new international disapproval of human rights abusers is felt every time a head of state is invited to an international meeting and every time a loan or line of credit is considered. Many local examples illustrate how global information flows have affected local institutions. These are big considerations, which have to be illustrated by local examples to be concretely discussed.³⁴

8.2. Key Findings

Seven important findings can be distilled from the discussion in this essay. First, democratic transitions are shaped by a complex interaction between historical legacies, economic imperatives, domestic power constellations, and

so on. Second, the democratic transitions of the early 1990s were not complete regime changes but led to different ways of combining old and new postcolonial or post-liberation elites and institutions. Third, in most African countries, it was not free and fair elections, but the international reputation cost to ruling elites of overtly fraudulent polls that led to transitions.

Fourth, democracy will be sustainable only if three core issues are eventually addressed: the prevalence and sources of ethnic conflicts; the degree of control civilians can exercise over the armed forces; and the degree of inclusion of those considered to be a 'we' excluded in national politics. Fifth, the existing theories and models dislike the persistence of success stories in Africa at the same time and risk making democracy promotion both in theory and in practice ethnocentric and monocultural. They also fail to shed light on some basic contemporary political processes, such as the role of the media and the culture of human rights or the impact of globalization on governance. Sixth, international support is necessary and, at times, can make a critical difference. Finally, political rights and civil liberties are most of the time a delicate matter and are best reinforced by repeated in-depth democratization processes rather than with rapidly cobbled-up transitions. In short, Africa's democratization presents both the international community and national social forces with an opportunity or a challenge for recommitting themselves to the twin principles of good global neighborliness and global justice. This is a double challenge not only for those who can command state power today and enjoy its domestic and international perks but also for would-be social actors fantasizing about tomorrow. After the collapse of the socialist ideal, these are the new crossroads of our epoch.

Conclusion

I have argued, instead, that long-enduring historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts shape the successive transitions occurring in the continent, creating governments from above and states from below. Moreover, I have demonstrated that the challenges regarding the processes of transition—and indeed regarding governing in conditions of transition—uncover the futility of asking the normative question as to the prospects themselves. Consequently, although a greater shared understanding is required of the role of the mass media, civil society, and individuals in processes of transition and consolidation, there is a need for research that is sensitive to the challenges of doing work that uncovers some of the less visible yet potentially influential barriers to successful democratization. The question of whether transitions to democracy or democratic consolidation can be said to have taken hold in Africa should remain unresolved. The dilemmas and conundrums faced at the current phase of transition are both new and increasingly complex to navigate, and

states, their people, and entities within and outside of them have yet to fully define, and in many cases, tackle even at their most rudimentary level.

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