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Democratic Scaffolding for a Globalizing Age

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The ordinary people of Africa... want independence from leaders whose misrule has intensified their poverty and exploitation to the point of being life-threatening. And they are convinced that they cannot now get material improvement without securing political empowerment and being better placed to bring public policy closer to social needs... A deeper commitment to democracy will encourage even development.”

—Claude Ake

A decade ago, Christopher Clapham and John Wiseman had proffered what they described as an “unromantic and pragmatic view” of the prospects of democracy in Africa, specifically suggesting that a realistic notion of the political systems evolving in Africa should be closer to the minimalist end of the spectrum than the maximalist end. Nevertheless, even their controversial call for a practicable version (in the sense of a ‘rough and ready’ one) rather than an ideologically idealistic model requires public contestation of power, in which a universally enfranchised citizenry would make their choice through a regular electoral process operating on the basis of political goods such as freedom of association and expression, the rule of law, and with a judiciary free from government control and abuse.
Amidst such ongoing debates about transitional goals, we cannot afford to lose sight of Ake's reminder that much of the popular drive for political reforms in Africa takes its bearings from the hope that the removal of repressive or unresponsive governments will generate rapid and palpable changes in the socio-economic conditions of the people. In such a context, proposals for change must be armed with a capacity to engender an active practice of transforming relations of power, domination and injustice. A tall order indeed. Yet the price of the failure to achieve this is tragically apparent in the growing ease with which governments are able to recruit large numbers of a frustrated and economically destitute populace in support of unconscionable policies that manipulate cleavages within the polity.

Consequently, I employ the concept of democratic development in my conversation around socio-political scaffolding to express a movement away from the notion of a minimalist procedural democracy in the sense of a focus on electoral and political liberalization processes but also away from the notion of economic development, narrowly defined in terms of economic growth and infrastructural development. Rather, I wish to invoke the intricate relationship between the goals of social, economic and political transformation and the integrated framework for empowering people to define, devise and demand the means of meeting their social and economic needs. As such, the process of democratic development involves a range of practices that enhance and broaden the range and application of civil and political rights, equal opportunity to resources, and claims to voice and democratic space. Conceptualizing democratic development as an integral aspect of political transitions and engineering suggests that we cannot define African politics in caricatures of dictatorial state power, whilst ignoring the tangible essence of struggle, resistance and the constant re-articulation of pressing socio-political and economic concerns by diverse populations. It also suggests that we must seek to capture the domestic and external factors that shape the political processes emerging across the continent. Our failure to capture and expose the nuanced arenas that define the directions and outcomes of political transitions in Africa rob us of the capacity to challenge, prescribe and transform such realities.

A recent publication on Africa featured on its cover, a map that described African countries in pithy word concepts—"personal rule", "socialism", "state collapse", "predatory rule", "Islam" etc. Such handy terms that seek to describe the dominant characteristic of the state often obscure the complexity of social, economic, religious, cultural and other factors that shape the agendas and characteristics of African countries, their public spaces and the engagement of state and citizenry. Rather, they allow the reader to conceptualize African societies as existing in some form of politi-
democratic rigor mortis, rigidified and transfixed into resistant alien political forms devoid of democratic notions.

While the use of these terms might well respond to the search for new ways of outdoing the other in expressing horror about the African dilemma, such labels often succeed only in eroding the complexity of struggles over rights and power that have been a part of the political reality of most African societies. There is no simple trajectory of politics and governance in the continent. African countries are not mere repositories of state brutality and repression, but have longstanding histories of popular democratic voice and resistance that have facilitated democratic transitions in many countries including Nigeria and Togo, as well as state failure in more extreme cases like Somalia, Liberia and Ethiopia.

Such evidence of societal democratization is particularly poignant when we consider the political contradictions of unexpected reversals in countries like the Gambia and Togo, in which in the first instance, a 1994 military coup d'état reversed almost 3 decades of established electoral traditions in the Gambia, while in the case of Togo, popular resistance and continental political pressures terminated the attempt to continue "personalist family rule" through the handover of political power to erstwhile president Houphuet Boigny's son.5

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for African states however is the fact that these domestic struggles for change must occur within the ambit of a globalizing world that offers both opportunity and challenge to the process of democratic transitions and effective governance in Africa. In this chapter, I re-examine the nature and trajectory of political transitions in the continent and then highlight the interface between domestic and external politics of democratic development and their implications for political transitions and governance in Africa.

The process of "democratizing" in a "globalizing" age opens a cauldron of questions and concerns that African scholars and activists will need to continue to address with some urgency. We must ask, what really are the most salient contributions of global and local institutions to the emergence of a culture of rights, to the process of individual, social and intellectual growth and capacity building? And how does the conflicted identity of post-colonial institutions and the socio-cultural and global context within which they function ultimately impact the meanings and concrete experiences of oppression, empowerment and rights?

In the African continent, the process of consolidating political voice and democratic processes, through the transformation of political, social, economic, legal, educational and administrative sites, structures and relations is fraught with contradictions. On one hand, domestic vulnerabilities
and the larger impact of a 'triumphal market theology' have generated an environment of extreme social and economic distress for many. The signs of material, socio-psychological and physical distress are easily observed. On the other hand, the reality of tangible material rewards creates a logical thrust for the continuation of global market alliances by key stakeholders. Thus the struggles over democratic voice and structures are impacted by the pressures of a globalizing process that reinforces both political repression and empowerment.6

TRANSITIONAL WAVES OR DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES? CHALLENGES TO A GLOBAL IMAGINARY

The notion of waves of democratic transition evoke an unfortunate dual symbolism in its metaphoric conceptualization of tidal waves, which obviously do not merely flow, but inevitably ebb. This unfortunate imagery popularized in Samuel Huntington’s jaundiced appraisal has become one of the dominant modes of analyzing politics in Africa and other Third world regions specifically in terms of state level political changes and broad regional trends. Thus, Crawford Young had described Africa’s waves of democratization as consisting of: first, constitutional changes that followed the decolonization struggles and thus heralded a transition from the dictatorial systems of the colonial system to models of ‘democratic constitutionalism’ typically copied from those same powers; and then of a short lived and “feeble” second wave that in the 1970s and early 1980s had threatened the trend toward a concentration of power in the postcolonial state.7

Young argues that the transient changes of the so-called second wave, brought about a number of defining transitions in the continent: “three of the bloodiest and most notorious tyrants—Idi Amin of Uganda, Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic and Francisco Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea—were deposed” and Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Senegal all experienced various political changes that seemed to challenge the dominant rules of the game.8

There has been popular assent to this notion that Africa’s third wave ensued in the late 1980s on the heels of a broad “wave” of democratic change sweeping the Third World. Such a view gained potency particularly when contextualized within the arena of specific changes in the global political economy created by the ebbing power and reach of the Soviet Union and the aggressive policy changes and international climate of the economic reform programs dictated by the international financial regimes represented by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These trends certainly occurred alongside the expansion of some visible
features of competitive politics, elections and constitution making across much of the continent.

However, we must re-open the question of whether these political changes of the so-called “third wave” can be delinked from those invoked as representing the “second wave” or in fact from what constitutes the continued socio-political redefinitions of the domestic political terrain. It is vital that we note the continuity of democratizing struggles on the African landscape, irrespective of the interjections of more propitious global political and economic changes. Young for instance, argued that the ‘popular welcome that greeted the Nigerian military intervention of late 1983 marked the end of the second wave”, but what he terms a “popular welcome” was not in any way an endorsement of an end to ‘democracy’ or popular preference for autocratic militarism. In fact, it was a very transient pronouncement of collective judgment on a corrupt and unresponsive government and best understood not as the death toll on democracy, but as part of a continuing dynamic process of popular voice decrying the experience of political corruption, lack of accountability and subversion of the electoral process by the incumbents.

We must also remember that the process of neo-liberal global economic restructuring that presumably generated the third wave was in fact already underway across the continent. Furthermore, the Algerian riots of 1988 and crises in other states in the late 1980s to 1990s were underlaid by clear patterns of pre-existing socio-economic grievances and coups in many African countries. The real question is why these extant patterns of social and political resistance gave birth to particular political transitions at some points in African post-independence history and it is this question that is partly answered by the discussions of the ebbing power and collapse of the Soviet Union, and the expansion of the triumphalist neoliberal ideology marketed by powerful international financial institutions and global corporate agencies etc.

It is within such frames that one can find any value in the concept of waves of transition that occurred at particular intersections of local and global political economy, to wit, the success of liberation struggles in the 1960s, the challenges to centralized power structures of the 1970s and 1980s and the continuation of those struggles in the 1990s and beyond. I use the word continuation advisedly, as a means of highlighting the fact that popular conceptualizations and demands for civil and political rights and economic changes did not radically change at any period in between the much vaunted “democratization waves”. It is imperative that as we re-envision the future of governance and transitions in Africa, we call attention to the need to redefine the meanings of such democratizing
To put it baldly, such an assumption of an ebb tide in democratizing processes in Africa is worrisome for it insists that we adopt a restricted understanding of democracy as we respond to the critical question of why certain struggles become pertinent or translate into change at some point in history or the other. For instance, while it has been claimed that Western globalizing regimes compelled economic and political liberalization in third world debtor states, which presumably translated into the third wave of democratization, such claims are problematic as they simultaneously neutralize our concern with the role of these same global forces in ignoring, destabilizing and invalidating the democratizing political processes underway in many African countries.

From the saga of Lumumba's Congo, to the repeated US protection of Zaire's dictator Mobutu and strategic accommodation with Nigeria's General Abacha, African realities remind us in fact that we are often dealing with a discourse of illusions in which the concept of waves of democracy in African countries responds most tangibly to Euro-centered concerns and willingness to validate the processes underway in the continent only at specific historical junctures. They also reflect a basic conflict over how to capture, define and conceptualize the process of democratic becoming.

If as I argue here, the social mobilizations, resistance and struggles of the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s were all part of the formation of the political terrain that anchors state level changes in the democratization process of nations, we cannot afford to ignore these critical processes in favor of a 'wave' conceptualization of democracy that only recognizes the incursion of electioneering procedures and competitive party politics as the notable episodes of democracy. Electoral processes constitute the most overt and visible forms of procedural democracy particularly to outside observers, as they signal important changes from an old regime to a new, but we must maintain a holistic view of the social and economic arenas in which democratic development processes in Africa are birthed and sustained outside of that fluctuating tide of electioneering change.

RE-THINKING THE IMPLICATIONS OF GLOBALIZATION FOR POLITICS IN AFRICA

We don't care who buys our [copper] mines just as long as the mines make money and contribute to the exchequer.


Globalizing forces unleash disquieting questions for Africa. The turbulent political economy of a continent engulfed in a web of complex and
often contradictory impulses generated by a changing global order are well demonstrated in Africa today. Unfortunately, the popular struggles for democracy and development in Africa threaten to be the victims in the reconstitution of the global imperative, at least in the short term. But not inevitably so, for the African situation is fraught with ambiguities: on one hand, a renewed civil society strengthening the trend towards democracy and demands for socio-economic development; on the other hand, the uneasy alliance between a number of African governments and the global economic forces that herald the growing functional integration of the world. Trends viewed by many as reinforcing the marginalization, impoverishment and trivialization of democratic processes in much of Africa and by others as opening up unprecedented opportunities for socio-political and economic change.

At a time, it seemed self-evident that many African governments generally resisted the economic regimes rooted in classical economic liberalism and imposed by the major industrial powers through multilateral economic institutions. Indeed a common complaint by international financial institutions was that African countries were running from the world economy while looking for an easy shortcut to development. On the contrary, the last two decades have witnessed the emergence of coalitions between an increasing number of African governments and the forces of economic globalization. Ndulu, van de Walle and colleagues argued that a theoretical consensus emerged in the development policy community during the late 1980s to 1990s about the explanations for Africa's economic crisis and the prerequisites of renewed growth there. This theoretical shift continues to hold sway today emphasizing the inadequacy of internal structures and conditions necessary for neo-liberal economic reforms as against the historical or structural explanations of underdevelopment. The priorities and 'tradeoffs' facing African governments that became committed to this 'consensus' were to include among other things, the adoption of outward-oriented strategies and policies to facilitate access to international markets, exchange, and investment and the acceptance that donor support will be extended increasingly only to governments that have demonstrated 'good behavior,' defined largely as adherence to the emerging consensus on neo-liberal reform programs.

As in other developing regions, globalization is frequently described as presenting African countries with significant opportunities for initiating and managing change. But the evidence clearly demonstrates that the imposition of neoliberal market reforms have been attended by growing impoverishment, deepening socio-economic inequalities, rural-urban migrations, growth of slums, worsening health crises, increasing levels of
crime and violence, social unrest and political destabilization. In spite of
this we are faced with the current reality of the scramble by many gov-
ernments to secure concessions in the evolving global political economy.
Claude Ake captures this aspect of economic globalization in rather cynical
yet accurate terms, as the "march of capital all over the world in search of
profit" and in this context, several leaders have continued to attract sub-
stantial foreign capital while in complete defiance of domestic and foreign
pressures for political reform. The allure of natural resources such as gold,
oil and diamonds obviously outweigh the problems of political violence,
repression, corruption and dense bureaucratization.

For instance, at the Edinburgh meeting of the Commonwealth Heads
of Government in October 1997, an economic theme was adopted for the
first time ever. Focusing on trade and investment (the "Road to Common-
wealth Prosperity"), the body adopted a joint declaration that emphasized
the opportunities of global economic globalization. As several observers
pointed out, with the emphasis on trade and investment, issues related to
democratization and human rights came a poor second. Thus, it was not
surprising that the organization did not follow through on its threat to
expel Nigeria, for instance, if it continued to flout the principles outlined
in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991—namely democracy,
good governance, sustainable development, respect for human rights and
fundamental freedoms.

The bold intransigence of the Nigerian government must be weighed
alongside the fact that a group of British corporations with major interests in
Nigeria openly lobbied their government before and during the conference.
Specifically, they requested that the British government refrain from impos-
ing any sanctions on the Nigerian government as it was "hard enough doing
business in Nigeria." A decade later, efforts to compel the government of
Zimbabwe to accede to popular struggles for change were limited by similar
concerns. Through the ascendancy of economic and strategic imperatives
in place of the geo-politics of the cold war period, the structure of state
authoritarianism in a world of cloven globalization is further entrenched.

From collapsed states such as Somalia, states with public authority but
a high degree of political instability such as Nigeria and Zaire, to countries
that can claim a stable civil environment and are today moving toward
more open and contested political systems the phenomenon of savvy
leaders and the disquieting political scenarios evoked by their ingenious
responses to the demands of an economically driven global system is of
particular importance at a period in post-Cold War global society when
Africa's democratic renewal supposedly has the greatest chance of attract-
ing international support.
Callaghy once reports his conversation with a Western business executive who at a point retorts; "Who cares about Africa; it is not important to us; leave it to the IMF and the World Bank." So today, the frantic efforts by China, the U.S and other western states to reenter the African continent as allies of the "new gulf oil states" indicates perhaps another tide in global interest in Africa. The changing global political economy in which political struggles in countries like Angola, Nigeria, the Sudan, Gabon, Chad, Cameroon, Sao Tome and Principe and Guinea will occur in the future will be defined largely by global interest in African oil and other resources. Jean-Christophe Servant reports that although the United States used to attach little importance to Africa, now it is reviewing its oil sources strategy. Sub-Saharan Africa, with its good quality reserves, could well account for twenty-five percent of all US crude oil imports by 2015.

Over the past few years, a cascade of reports and news items, obscured from the attention of the western public make it quite clear that several African countries are being redefined in global geo-strategic calculus as the "new gulf" or the "Kuwait of Africa". Richard Wall's scathing commentary is representative of the apprehensions of many observers:

Against a backdrop of politically correct self-flagellation by a bemused [US] president who has told us that "Africa is a nation that suffers from incredible disease"...and the perceived need for a generous spreading of liberal social-democracy, West Africa has all the ingredients for righteous intervention by the empire in its on-going pursuit of benevolent global hegemony.... It is not hard to fathom that P43 [US President George Bush Jr.] and his entourage, who visited Nigeria and other countries on their recent whirlwind tour of Africa, were really on another mission altogether. For at the end of this rainbow of opportunity for humanitarian interventionists, weapons manufacturers and self-appointed experts in 'good governance' – lies the glittering prize of all prizes: black oil.

And again...

African oil is of national strategic interest to us," said Assistant Secretary of State for Africa and former Scowcroft group member Walter H. Kansteiner III at a January 2002 symposium on African oil held in Washington DC and organized by the Institute for Advanced Political and Strategic Studies (IASPS) ... which in 1996 brought us Richard Perle's "A Clean Break: A New Strategy For Securing The Realm." This organization has been at the forefront of successful attempts to persuade
the United States P43 administration that it needs to diversify its sources of oil supply, and move away from the 'unfriendly' old gulf (that's the Persian gulf) to exploit the 'new gulf'—the gulf of Guinea in West Africa. “Africa...” said congressional Sub-Committee on Africa chairman Rep. Ed Royce (R-California) at the same event, “is less of a long-term threat in terms of our dependency on foreign oil. It is very difficult to imagine a Saddam Hussein in Africa... I think African oil should be treated as a priority for U.S. national security post-9/11, and I think that post 9/11 it has occurred to all of us that our traditional sources of oil are not as secure as we once thought they were.25

Servant also insists that other discrete interventions in oil-producing African countries seem to corroborate the trend, notably U.S support for peace talks in Sudan at the beginning of 2002 and gentle pressure on Nigeria to leave OPEC, Colin Powell’s visit to Gabon, the first visit for a US secretary of state, President George Bush’s symbolic breakfast party for 10 heads of state from central Africa, the visit by General Carlton Fulford, US military command in Europe, to Sao Tome and Principe to review the security of oil operators in the Gulf of Guinea and the possibility of setting up a regional military command centre there, similar to the one in South Korea.26 The reason for the growing interest in Africa is not hard to understand, he argues, as sub-Saharan Africa already produces as much as Iran, Venezuela and Mexico combined with expected massive increases in output by oil producers such as Angola, Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea. African reserves are already attracting major investments by European and US companies with some acerbic competition emerging as some European countries defend their interest against new US entrants.27

Of even greater allure are the political advantages. Roger Diwan, a managing director of the Petroleum Finance Company explained that “there is a long-term strategy from the US government to weaken OPEC’s hold on the market and one way to do that is to peel off certain countries.” None of these new gulf oil states, apart from Nigeria, was a member of OPEC, and Robert Murphy, a state department adviser on Africa makes their appeal clear: “Much of West Africa’s oil is offshore, insulated from domestic political or social turmoil. Political discord or dispute in African oil states is unlikely to take on a regional or ideological tone that would result in a joint embargo by suppliers at once.”28

The implications are disturbing and portend a new wave in Western influence in African politics and governance with increases in US defense attaches and proposals for securing African oil from “terrorism.” Richard
Wall notes that the tiny two-island state of São Tomé e Príncipe was earmarked by U.S. strategists as a possible location for the regional homeport of a future US Forces Southern Atlantic sub-command in a list of regional security recommendations of the African Oil Policy Initiative Group's 2002 white paper...which also suggested that "a US-Nigerian compact on regional security issues should be established to make the area more secure and thereby more attractive for direct foreign investment." Today, the US has embarked on systematic diplomatic and economic overtures to African governments to convince leaders and their citizens to buy into the now established US military command for Africa.

Commentators continue to decry the fact that since 1996 the U.S. has emerged as the largest foreign investor in Equatorial Guinea with Exxon/Mobil and Hess among corporations engaged in large-scale off-shore production, leading to an astounding gross domestic product growth that supported the repressive and corrupt regime of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. Kevin Clark for instance argues:

Shamefully, it appears that as long as he is willing to provide a new pipeline to the U.S., the Bush administration, which has strong ties to many of the major corporate players in Equatorial Guinea, is content to hold its nose and stick out its hand. There is talk in Washington about beginning military training programs or establishing a new navy command .... Like an addict whose illness compels the same hurtful patterns and disfiguring decisions, the U.S. stands again on an oil-addled precipice. We can either take that first hard step and admit our collective problem with oil or we can begin the cycle one more time in West Africa, supporting a totalitarian kleptocracy that will keep the spigots open even as it keeps a heavy boot on the democratic aspirations of its own people.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF CHANGE IN AFRICA

Regardless of one's predilection for particular forms of democracy, it is apparent that even the most minimalist form of democracy today must occur within the constricting interstices of a globalizing age, which Kennedy described a long time ago as the "coalescence of varied transnational processes and domestic structures, allowing the economy, politics, culture, and ideology of one country to penetrate another." Paradoxically, those powerful market forces, international financial institutions, industrial states, international non-governmental organizations and the network of
Internationally engaged individuals and groups that presage such changes are the same forces joined in the discourse over the trajectory of political struggles in Africa. All too often, they intervene to define the nature and use of power, governance, protest and authority in African countries.

The popular notion of globalization as constituting some form of a benign global vilalization has been taken to task by the late African political scientist Professor Claude Ake who argued that what is being globalized is "not Yoruba but English, not Turkish pop culture but American, not Senegalese technology but Japanese and German. Globalization is then an ongoing process of ambiguous homogenization as well as a crystallization of power and hierarchization of the global order". Holm and Sorensen have forwarded a nuanced view of these intertwined processes as they affect the third world, describing it as uneven globalization in which the intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations across borders ... is uneven in both intensity and geographical scope, in both the international and domestic dimension.

In spite of such variegation, the literature highlights the dramatic outcome of the political subordination of national systems to international economic and political actors and processes. The implications are dire and suggest that socio-economic globalization may serve to consolidate the existing global and domestic hierarchies and structuration of power. No wonder that with specific reference to the African continent, Ake argued urgently for a vibrant participatory democracy that empowers the ordinary African politically, socially and economically as the most critical political response to globalization.

But his view runs counter to an often unspoken global persuasion that continues to perceive of participatory democracy as a luxury in a continent beset by grievous economic ills. The reasoning is simple, globalization will presumably increase the markets, resources and technologies available for development if African governments increase their capacity to implement key policies and take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves. Since much of this capacity building and ultimate regime viability will require substantial painful market reform, an implicit understanding has evolved over time around a "need" to de-prioritize political liberalization and democratization in Third World development. For instance, against the backdrop of Asian economic growth and just prior to the collapse of those "Tiger" economies in the crises of 1997, Monshipouri had concluded, in some affinity perhaps with those who call euphemistically for the installation of "market democracies" that:
In the long run, the main concern need not be the promotion of more stable democracies in the Third World, but rather the creation of conditions that can sustain a steady transition. The importance of properly planned structural adjustment must not be underemphasized. Furthermore, since building democracy and a free market at the same time may be impracticable in tumultuous Third World politics, it may be necessary to afford economic liberalization a higher priority than democratization.36

A decade later, Bhagwati affirmed the same philosophy in even stronger terms. In his “defense of globalization”, Bhagwati asks “why are the critics of globalization agitated? What bothers them?”. To answer his own questions, he categorizes the critics as comprising two main groups that need to be distinguished.

First there is a multitude of hard-core protestors who have deep seated antipathy to globalization....many of them buy into a linked trilogy of discontents that take the form successively of an ethos composed of an anti-capitalist, anti-globalization, and acute anti-corporation mind-set. ...beyond understanding where their discontents come from, as I do presently, there is little that one can do to enter into a dialogue with them. Second, however, there are the critics of globalization whose discontents are well within the parameters of mainstream dissent and discourse....These critiques, which amount in my view to a gigantic non sequitur, are of a very different order from the hard-core criticisms... and need an extended and careful response. I provide that....by demonstrating that, in fact, the various social causes that we all embrace, such as advancement of gender equality and reduction of poverty, are advanced, not set back, by globalization.37

Such views have not gone unchallenged. Osvaldo Sunkel for instance argues that one of the consequences of globalization is a generalized worldwide economic reform trend toward the dismantling of the public sector which led to economic growth and social development in the postwar period and that in contrast to the core industrialized nations, where many protectionist practices and barriers (national or regional) remain untouched, wholesale, intense reforms have occurred mainly in global peripheral economies in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe with major external and domestic configurations.38 While liberal market reforms, a key part of the contemporary political-economic dispensations
in Africa, might represent a concern for competitive efficiency and economic growth, numerous studies reveal that these processes often engender a hierarchization of power in the international system and exacerbate instability in the Third World. Indeed, Adebayo Adeyemo, former executive director of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), concluded that globalization will only exacerbate poverty in Africa.39

Clearly the global environment introduces a cascade of contradictory issues for political struggles in Africa, including the phenomenon of regimes committed to implementing market reforms and seeking to attract global capital for reasons of economic and political expediency. Such accommodation or adaptation to the ‘new era’ of international business is not a consequence of ignorance about their implications for the aggravation of inequalities and fragmentation, diminution of state sovereignty, or Zurns “deficit in the capacity to govern.”40 Neither does it reflect a profound belief in that idealized prospect of a globalized society without war, “a world where states to an increasing degree are enmeshed in structures in which both individuals and non-state institutions are of importance”, in which notions of hegemony become increasingly irrelevant and economic inequalities are gradually eradicated as the state gives way to the logic of the market.41

ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES AND THE LANDSCAPE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL STRUGGLES

Within the continent itself, there is a perception that accommodation to the global political economy is among other reasons, an effort to recapture external legitimacy by leaders besieged by strong internal opposition. The appeal to the external for legitimacy is not a new phenomenon, but hitherto it was largely hinged on the logic of cold war politics. In the present dispensation, it may be the politics of international economics or of global ‘terrorism’. For instance, in an address to the chief executives of the Nigerian private sector in 1991, erstwhile military dictator, General Babangida ‘humorously’ addressed the corporate chiefs as “Co-Directors of Nigeria Incorporated’, the pivotal organization under which the search for national economic transformation would henceforth be sustained.42 Popular suspicions in the country about the political and diplomatic implications of his economic reform programs rapidly inspired intense domestic criticism and opposition. By the time the incoming regime of General Sani Abacha renewed this search for accommodation with forces of the free market through privatization programs, several analysts responded with scathing rejoinders:
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We are back to the same swan-song in General Sani Abacha’s newfangled economic policy the so called Vision 2010. Underpinning this latest attempt to sell yet another dummy to Nigerians is the assumption that all that is needed to keep Nigerians quiet and happy ... to successfully ambush the popular clamor for a return to democratic rule is to pursue Babangida’s policy to its logical conclusion. Sell off the nation’s refineries, introduce tuition in the universities, privatize the remaining banks—in short sell off Nigeria to the highest bidder and then sit back and hope the new “entrepreneurs”, pursuing the profit motive, will run Nigeria PLC profitably and efficiently for the benefit of all. But all these can not be achieved in an atmosphere of ‘political agitation’.43

In seeming response to such protestations, at the turn of the millennium, African Ministers at a conference organized by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) had issued the following statement, “confronted with the relentless march of global competition, Africa must intensify its economic reforms, boost domestic savings and investment, and expand foreign trade.”44 Yet for two decades, the World Bank itself had professed awareness of the need to align economic dictates with political empowerment. For instance, the 1989 World Bank report; “From Crisis to Sustainable Development”, acknowledged that political and economic reforms in Africa must seek to empower ordinary people to take charge of their lives, to make communities more responsible for their development and to make governments listen to their people.

African scholars, however are all too cognizant of the contradictory and specious nature of World Bank’s exhortations. Alidou’s stinging indictment of the Bank’s “African Capacity Building Initiative” (ACBI) built on the writings of numerous scholars such as George Caffentzis, in describing its devastating effects, “its implicit devaluation of the African intellect,” promotion of Africa’s dependence on foreign agencies and “donors”; and failure to recognize that the collapse of the African university system for instance, is itself a direct consequence of the World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs.45

The implications are myriad. With specific reference to democracy, Baeg begins with an analysis of the debate raging between what he calls neo-liberal optimists and pessimists. The former argue that because capitalism and democracy share an organizing principle—that decentralized exchanges between producers and consumers (capitalism) or between politicians and voters (democracy) produce an efficient allocation of goods and services, or political power—capitalism and democracy are mutually
reinforcing. In contrast, so-called “pessimists” argue that the benefits of globalization are distributed unevenly between advanced capitalist countries and developing countries and that this imbalance will destabilize the new democracies of the Third World.\(^\text{46}\)

It was in this vein that Steven Volk disputed the common assumption in Western political discourse, that democracy is the characteristic political form of capitalism and that the unrestrained operation of the markets for capital and labor constitutes the material base of democracy. He warned that empirical evidence clearly suggests that what is important is the “class nexus between development and democracy. It is the transformation of class structures which permits the strengthening of the working and middle classes and the weakening of the landed upper classes.” To the contrary, an overview of African countries suggests that in much of the continent, the global political economy has impoverished and weakened the middle and working classes while intensifying the concentration of power and wealth within a small elite class.\(^\text{47}\)

**'NEW' AFRICAN LEADERS AND POLITICAL TRANSITIONS**

The term ‘new’ is hardly the most accurate appellation for leaders such as the former President Rawlings of Ghana or Yoweri Museveni of Uganda who stayed in power in various guises for over a decade. Yet they were described in the international media and by a variety of Western leaders and policy makers as heralds of a new generation of African leadership. The term ‘new’ was used in the sense that irrespective of their individual political and ideological proclivities they were deemed to represent an emerging crop of economically savvy and enlightened African leaders with an avowed commitment to neo-liberal economic reforms. Having tenaciously adhered to the structural adjustment policies of international financial institutions and in some cases restored a semblance of stability to war ravaged countries; it came as no surprise that their equivocal attitude to democratization was received by a rather “humbled” silence in global arena. News reports on Africa in the late 1990s are illuminating:

The president of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, has become the darling of major international donors such as the World Bank and the United States.... On her recent trip to East and Central Africa, Secretary of State, Madeleine K. Albright called him “a beacon of hope”. A proponent of the so-called Asian model of development, Museveni believes that in “pre-industrial” societies such as his, economic strength must precede democratic growth. His attention to Uganda's economy has made it among
Africa's strongest this decade, with consistent growth rates of 5 percent and above. "Liberal democracy grows hand in hand with industrialization," he says. "Political change is the roof... the economy is the foundation." For many critics, such talk harks back to the Cold War, when the West often traded off leaders' democratic shortcomings for ideological loyalty. Many analysts believe that policy strengthened despots and contributed to the enervating instability that has blanketed the continent for much of the past three decades. They fear that the West may again be treading the same path.48

While these leaders were often greeted with such acclamation, commentators such as Buckley, in an article titled "Authority's Changing Face in Africa; Enlightened Leaders or Savvy Strongmen?" had more muted responses about leaders who mostly rose out of the ranks of the military, acquired power through a coup or insurgency and have maintained political power through continued militarization or authoritatively engineered civilianization.49 Buckley argues that the new breed of African leaders, are marked by other mutual characteristics including the fact that they have close relations with their major donors, drawing hundreds of millions of dollars in aid annually.50 Apart from Museveni and Rawlings, other leaders applauded by the West at various periods in the past decade, had included Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, President Issaias Afwerki of Eritrea, Paul Kagame of Rwanda, President Laurent Kabila of Congo and so on.

Monga's review of the remarkable creativity of political leaders is instructive. He notes that the rapidity with which they have deciphered the vocabulary of the new era has led to a new discourse centered on democracy. Within the range of these modernized techniques of political survival and exclusion, a number of themes have found ready acceptance among the global intellectual and policy community such as; 'the population is politically immature', 'the democratic process cannot be supported in the current state of economic underdevelopment', 'democracy must be informed by intrinsic cultural precepts' and so on.51 Their diplomatic sophistry is well matched by the acute insights of the citizenry. Irrespective of their reception in global arenas, the failure of governments to live up to the electoral (or coup) promises of rapid change, political liberalization and human rights protection, continues to attract a range of critical responses from African citizenry: from violent resistance to wry political humor as in the many jokes of unknown authorship circulating daily on the virtual sites of African scholars and citizens:
Once at a conference, three scientists: an American, a German and a Nigerian, were talking and bragging about the technological advances of their respective countries in the field of medicine.

Says the American, “In Washington, there was a baby boy born without forearms, so we attached artificial forearms on him. Now that he is grown, he is an Olympic boxer and a gold medalist at that!”

The German replied, “That’s nothing to what we have done. Back in Berlin, there was a baby girl born without legs, we attached artificial legs on her, and she is now a 3 times Olympics marathon gold medalist!!”

The Nigerian interjected laughing, “Is that all you have done, and just a gold medalist? In Abeokuta, we had a baby boy born without a head. We attached a coconut to his neck and he is now the president of Nigeria!

THE STRUCTURE OF GLOBAL CONSENSUS AND AFRICA’S POLITICAL RENEWAL

While the end of the cold war supposedly shattered the tacit assumption that self-contained economic reconstruction could advance without corresponding political change, industrial countries still send mixed messages to Africa as Harbeson and other scholars concur. They encourage integration with the global economy they dominate through multilateral channels (international financial institutions) while they discourage integration in bilateral relationships by retaining barriers to African participation.52 Reflecting the cynicism of many observers, David Throup also wrote, “Western governments, on paper strong supporters of democracy, inevitably balance their ...commitment to democracy with the desire for political stability and the pursuit of their national self-interest.” As a result, he contends, “they’re often inclined to accept friendly governments with dubious democratic credentials rather than to risk the instability and unpredictability that accompanies far-reaching change.”53

There is evidence of alliances between global capital and numerous African governments who understand the language of global economic restructuring and are prepared to speak it in exchange for the procurement of external legitimacy. Ugandan Finance Minister, Jehoash Mayanja Nkangi, to thunderous applause from the global community, had noted at the turn of the millennium that his country has opened up the currency to the free market “so that it sells like cabbage”. Indeed, Uganda was “rewarded for its performance. It became the first country to benefit from...
debt relief offered by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund—dlrs 700 million was forgiven of its debt of dlr$ 3.4 billion.54

During US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright’s weeklong tour of selected African nations (including Uganda, Rwanda, Congo, Angola, South Africa and Zimbabwe) at that same period, she acknowledged that the United States for more than three decades viewed Africa as little more than a disaster-prone Cold War battlefield but pledged ... to open a “new chapter” in relations with countries on the continent that promise to build democracy and free market economies.55

In Albright’s tour and later, President Clinton’s tour which included a trip to Ghana, the constant theme was a call to “open markets, honest government and the rule of law”. When challenged over the fact that many of these regimes they supported were ruled by military fiat and decrees that justify the abrogation of rights and basic freedoms, US officials were reportedly quoted as saying, “We don’t do Mary Robinson”, an allusion to the U.N high commissioner for human rights. Indeed, other senior U.S officials have been cited as arguing that there is a need to allow national leaders whose security forces may seem excessively ‘vigorous’ to explain the need for force.56

“Market democracies” may appear to provide the economic resurgence urgently required across the continent, but it is alarming that the process of achieving such is veiled in allusions to “vigorous force” and readiness to accept the delimitation of the rights of democracy. Africa has been beset by global tides that affirm and alternately deny the desirability and feasibility of democratization for the continent. In their contribution to the early evolving discourse on African democracy and development, Rothchild and Ravenhill for instance concluded “It may well be that full democratization will have to await the construction of a strong economic base, and it is to the latter that priority should be given. But if the United States chooses this alternative, it should not prevent the promotion of other dimensions of basic human rights throughout Africa.”57

Like other such advocates, they fail to explain precisely how the United States will facilitate the emergence of authoritarian regimes devoted to economic reconstruction nor how the United States will ensure that “other dimensions of basic human rights” will be enforced under such benign autocrats. Faced with evidence of a deepening socio-economic crisis, the concession by a globalizing world has been the call for “good governance.” But bilateral and multilateral donors seem yet to understand that African governments must derive their legitimacy primarily from domestic rather than international or multilateral sources. Some years back, the president of the World Bank pronounced in seemingly uncompromising terms:
The development of many Sub-Saharan African countries has been quite unnecessarily constrained by their political systems. People need freedom to realize individual and collective potential. I fear that many of Africa’s leaders have been more concerned about retaining power than about the long-term development interests of their people. The cost to millions of Africans...has been unforgivably high.

The result of such ‘concerns’ was the imposition of political conditionality on aid to African governments, a step that has attracted heated debate with scholars such as Ihonvbere offering blunt criticisms of the role of foreign actors in the continental crises. "Political conditionality, with its emphasis on transparency, accountability, certainty and so on, enables donors, creditors and lenders to put pressure on recalcitrant and repressive leaders. But we cannot however overlook the fact that these same African leaders were in many instances, installed, nurtured and sustained over the years by the same Western leaders who have now turned against them. Many African leaders have perfected the art of brutal and inhuman politics, divide-and-rule tactics, and a total commitment to the retention of power through the asphyxiation of civil society.

Critics of political conditionality have emerged from various ideological persuasions, with many revealing a distressing ignorance of the nature of democratic voice in Africa. Todd Moss for instance, examined what he describes as the limits of liberal universalism and asked, "Is America really prepared to undertake a social engineering project so large as restructuring other nations and their cultural traits in order to match a desired liberal political order?" Moss reflects that problematic persuasion in which the values, concepts and structures of democracy are regarded as a uniquely Euro-American invention founded on purely western goals and ‘traits’. This indicates of course, a misreading of the troubled political history of the western world, but also reveals an inability to comprehend the long history of democratic socio-political values reflected in indigenous political structures and contemporary struggles for political change across much of the African continent. Unfortunately, such puerile notions provide grist for the rather sanctimonious ‘let well alone’ formulations of those who contend that African countries are too deeply invested in authoritarian structures to engender democratic societal and policy processes.

REVISITING THE FOOD OR VOTES DEBATE

Amartya Sen has provided a vigorous challenge to the notion that economic development must come before democracy and the attempt to secure political rights. While the subject of political rights has been on
the agenda of numerous international forums, it is still greeted by much skepticism veiled behind the seeming innocuous question; “Why bother about the finesse of democracy given the overpowering grossness of material need?” The belief that political rights correlate negatively with economic growth evades a number of relevant issues and Sen argues that such a dichotomous view of the problem speaks of an incorrect way of understanding first, the force of economic needs and, second, the salience of political rights. The real issues involve taking note of extensive interconnectedness between rights and needs—such connections are both instrumental and constitutive.

If people are the agents of development—that is, those with the responsibility to decide what development is, what values it is to maximize, and the methods for realizing it—they must also have the prerogative of making public policy at all levels. They must not merely participate in the conventional sense of the word; they must be the ones to decide on how to proceed with social transformation. To be sure, up to a point it is possible for the people to be the means of development without the need for a democratic political system: the people can be coerced or manipulated to give their resources to promote their leaders notion of development. However, this process... is oppressive and exploitative rather than emancipatory, and a process that is not emancipatory cannot be conducive to development... Finally if people are the end of development, then their well-being is the supreme law of development... the only way to ensure that social transformation is not dissociated from the well-being of the people is to institute democracy.

It is also important to remember that it is the years of dictatorial rule first by western colonial states and then their protégés that have produced the very situation for which autocrats are peddled as the cure. It is not surprising that it was not till the Asian crises of the late 1990s, that there was a decline in the call for “a benign, efficient dictatorship with the “appropriate” macroeconomic framework for African countries.” Scholars have observed that there is a decided weakness in the process of causal empiricism that supposedly underlies these generalizations about the impact of authoritarianism on prosperity and despite the character of political structures in Asia, it cannot be argued that authoritarianism is a necessary or sufficient condition for long-term development in Africa.” Not surprisingly, Kieh argues that, “the neocolonial African state which has served as the conduit for repression, oppression and exploitation cannot play the role of purveyor of democracy... the neo-colonial state and its structures must
be transformed so that they serve the interests of the peoples of Africa, rather than those of the African ruling class and their external patrons.  

A proper conceptualization of democracy certainly takes it beyond the procedural, electoral or polyarchic models so apparent in Africa’s current transitions. Yet, Plattner and Gersham raise a strong defense even for these relatively unsuccessful ‘undemocratic’ processes:

The new pessimists criticize the simplistic view that elections are sufficient to make a country free. But they commit the same fallacy, failing to recognize that democratization is a process of transition, not an instant transformation to a new order... The danger with elections, it is said is that they empower majorities that may favor policies motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance or by short-term economic interests. This is a danger, but what is the alternative? The critics tend to suggest some version of what might be called “liberal nondemocracy”—an unelected government that preserves political stability, promotes economic development, observes the rule of law and generally respects the rights of its subjects. In theory, such a benevolently authoritarian government might be preferable to a corrupt and illiberal democracy. But where can we find one in the real world? The critics cite very few contemporary examples.

Confronted by ‘dangerous sources of internal opposition’ arising from their ruthless use of power and state resources as well as endemic economic crisis, many African regimes have attempted to entrench themselves in power by using the machinery of state to suppress or co-opt any rival organization. What is of great concern to domestic forces in the African continent is the fact that economic reform has given a number of regimes political legitimacy and reinforced their privileged positions as intermediaries between their societies and sources of external power. In this position, they have been able to fully dictate the terms of political liberalization, that is the timing of reforms (if at all) and the manipulation of the conditions and processes that would ensure their perpetuation, civilianization or maximization of influence on electoral outcomes.

Virtually all the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa have commenced some form of neo-liberal market reforms with Zaire, Togo, Mali, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana on the list of the most prominent privatizing countries. The social impact of various liberalization and privatization programs has aggravated domestic disequilibrium and deepened the crisis of poverty in much of the continent compelling the IMF and World Bank to launch the joint program (HIPC, Heavily
Indebted Poor Countries) intended to reward governments sustaining reform policies, by reducing their debt servicing burden. This is obviously welcome in many countries where governments expend four times as much on debt servicing as they do on social services.

The earlier picture of economic renaissance lauded by Western analysts with regards to the economies of Uganda, Ghana, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo was clearly an incomplete one. In the Congo, after a drop in inflation from an astounding 24,000 percent under Mobutu to a mere 70 percent, under Kabila, the economy suffered major reversals due largely to a climate of intense political disaffection and turmoil; Ghana’s success story is heavily underwritten by World Bank loans which make the country one of Africa’s biggest borrowers, with aid amounting in some years to 11 percent of GDP; and World Bank officials have been repeatedly informed by lead economists and researchers in Uganda that the liberalization and privatization programs had destroyed jobs and local industries, impoverished producers of indigenous crops and worsened the general conditions of the poor.75

ENVISIONING NEW PATHWAYS FOR POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA AND CONSOLIDATING CHANGE

The evolving nature of global strategic interests exposes the fragility of notions of democratic waves that correspond only with broad global polarities and epochs. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the so-called third wave of democratic transitions, Africa Fund’s Jennifer Davis provided a revealing analysis of the convoluted relationship between American policymakers, corporations and Nigeria’s former military regime:

What seems lacking now is not an analysis to support the imposition of sanctions, but rather the will to act to support democracy in Nigeria. The White House has avoided involving human rights and environmental groups in the current review process and Congress seems paralyzed by a combination of corporate lobbying and Nigerian influence buying. Recent reports raise concerns about whether illegal Nigerian campaign contributions have touched the review process; there is certainly growing evidence of Nigerian payoffs to U.S religious and political leaders, although grassroots support for sanctions is still growing.76

The scope for concerted action is still large even if the challenges are daunting. Sunkel acknowledges this in his analysis of Latin America,
"how can we impregnate capitalism with the public and social concerns of socialism without frightening the capitalist entrepreneur and at the same time avoid militarized bureaucratic authoritarianism of the right or the left and strive for more individual and social freedom? How can we avoid that the process toward transnational integration and the pressure for increased competitiveness lead to further national economic, social and cultural disintegration?" He suggests that the solution lies in a democratic structure strengthened by civil society and by increased support from the developed nations. Such support should take the form of increased access to their markets, decreased debt service and easier terms for technology transfer rather than the imposition of sweeping economic reform packages.

Prezowski's conclusions provide an even more telling illustration of the frustration of observers, "Capitalism is irrational, socialism is unfeasible, in the real world people starve—the conclusions we have reached are not very encouraging" and in such a context he advocates a meeting of moderates from both camps to negotiate what may be at best some form of procedural democracy. Beyond such ideological struggles, two aspects of the transitional process seem to beg urgent attention. The first is the process of sustaining and validating the struggle for political change. Indeed, the ability of democracy movements to sustain and mobilize for a long struggle and to attract internal and international support in the face of the economic maneuvers of reforms-oriented autocrats must be addressed more closely in research. The second is the post-electioneering confrontation with the immense challenges of consolidating democratic governance and sustaining new socio-political structures.

Generating and sustaining popular support in the face of economic diplomacy by authoritarian regimes and their foreign partners demands ingenuity towards building a transparent, politically vibrant, stable and participatory polity. Indeed, the ascendancy of the market logic and the simultaneous deepening of poverty and large scale suffering across the continent suggest that even pro-democracy groups in Africa will face major challenges to validate their struggle and earn domestic legitimacy. Luckhead and White for instance argue that this requires "measures to prevent the continued dominance of unaccountable elites able to manipulate democratic institutions to their advantage as a result of low levels of popular participation and control. Hence, the activities of democratic movements must involve practical involvement in critical arenas of community development and struggles for social justice and change. As activists and scholars address critical issues such as constitutionalism, political corruption and the refashioning of political institutions, such projects must also recognize that amidst the pressures of a globalizing age, the potentials
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for democracy struggles in many parts of Africa to degenerate into violent conflict are very high.

Attempts to prescribe for the future are inherently judgmental in that they necessarily legitimize particular processes at the expense of others. Nevertheless, we must give weight to the oft ignored transformations occurring at the societal level and in other public spaces. These dynamics are too often ignored in analyses that imagine tidal waves of apathy and change occurring in the African polity. Across the continent, political struggles have centered on the need to reconstruct the colonial and postcolonial state, transforming the nature and use of power and creating a political process that is sustainable in its task of responding to the complex socio-political and economic interests of its constituents. Few analysts would gainsay the reality of multiple failures in that regard, yet the continuity of resistance and mobilizations are remarkable testaments to the vibrant quest for voice and rights in Africa's socio-political landscape. Such accomplishments remind us of the complexities and contradictions in the relationship between procedural political changes marked by elections and the social forces that facilitate them. While elections are of critical importance, they do not of themselves nullify the power alignments which all too often reproduce and facilitate the suppression of political voice and popular participation. Indeed, they may serve to reinforce domestic and global hierarchies that are inimical to political democratization at its most meaningful level.

An important illustration of the continuity of social forces in struggles for democratic change can be seen in the area of women's equality. It would seem axiomatic to many observers that in a continent marked by turbulence and economic privations, African women must be systematically oppressed within the cultural realm and also marginalized in political calculus. However, in addition to the wealth of literature that offers an exciting perspective on indigenous women's mobilization and voice, for the past few years, the global data on women in parliament, collated by the Interparliamentary Union has provided fascinating insights for those interested in examining the complexities of politics, liberalizing spaces, institutions and democratic empowerment across the world. Almost unbelievably, Rwanda, a country recovering from the horrors of genocide has been ranked first in the world with over 30 percent of women in parliament, a position it has consistently held for some years now and of course, Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, recently became another of the continent's female heads of government.

In sharp contrast, it is clear that while its stable democratic state with established modes of political renewal, electioneering and constitutional
governance might have gradually supported the enlargement of the dividends of social and economic progress in the United States, it has not necessarily translated into increased political access and power for American women. The United States for instance, in 2006 ranks at number 66 of a global classification of percentages of women in National Parliament trailing behind about 76 countries, including numerous African countries: Mozambique, South Africa, Seychelles, Namibia, Uganda, Tunisia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Guinea, Senegal, Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe. It is closely ranked within the range occupied by countries devastated by warfare, poverty and political instability, including Angola, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Malawi.

What do we make of such a mixed balance sheet? How does it moderate the ostensible goals of "consolidating" change? How do we define the nature of changes that should be consolidated within the emerging political system and the social institutions that support and define such a state? Aside from the deserved pride and jubilations that should accompany the political, ideological, cultural and social accomplishments of growing female representation in the political institutions of several African countries, we must perhaps confront the fact that political access and power does not necessarily translate into broad based social and economic rights, well being and protection for all women.

These layered realities assist us in understanding the ways in which myriad factors, including decisive contemporary political agenda setting, historic legacies of political rights to voice and participation within the indigenous political arenas or even the turbulent aftermath of conflict and destabilization are involved in recreating a propitious terrain for change. At the same time, seemingly 'advanced' democracies can become impervious to reform as the illusion of 'social and economic security', the institutionalization and consolidation of prohibitive democratic processes and the 'rule of law' neutralize popular democratic voice and normalize marginalization in affluent societies such as the United States.

Such contradictions unsettle our packaged concepts of democracy and also serve as a discomfiting reminder of the necessity of establishing priorities and creating a system capable of measuring progress toward societal goals. Do we measure the percentage of women in parliament, or less tangible indicators of silencing and marginalization, the status of laws that enfranchise or defraud citizenry rights, the success or failure of citizens in securing and utilizing political access for palpable democratic gains, the success of the rule of law in transforming prevailing cultures of domination, inequity and abuse or the role of ongoing social resistance in displacing and transforming such structures and hierarchies at local and national levels?
By insistently reviewing and revealing the hidden, urgent or more subtle mechanisms and agencies that define and mediate the politics and search for effective governance in African countries, the contributors to this volume have drawn us even closer to an understanding of the problems and prospects of transitions and possibilities for sustained political transformation in Africa. Notwithstanding the wealth of analyses of the nature, dimensions and historicity of political transitions in Africa, most scholars remain constantly taxed by the reality of a terrain that rarely responds to Western formulaic conceptualizations of change. The immense economic, social, religious and cultural diversities within the African continent act as a constant reminder that as we inch our way forward in research, it would be a grave error to suppose that the primary challenge is simply one of description, of conceptualizing crises and conjuring explanatory variables.

What modes of governance can reverse the trends towards destabilization and polarization along religious, ethnic and other lines in the African continent? How can the state be transformed from dancing attendance on externally derived legitimacy to becoming accountable to a citizenry empowered to participate in an agenda setting process that seeks to meet the socio-economic needs of the population?

Political transitions to deepened democratic realities must ultimately yield substantive outcomes in how governments, organizations and communities do business within and with one another. With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that African scholars have repeatedly emphasized the role of institutions in agenda setting, in mediating the use of political power even in situations of perceived justifiable illiberality, in setting the rules that can guide, define and legislate on rights, citizenship and protections and can create a transformed public space. Within the constitution making and peace building agendas advocated by several analysts, it is possible to envisage the emergence of multiethnic communities that have a sense of citizenship rights and integrated nationalisms.

Clearly there is a need to recreate institutional frameworks that reposition individuals in spaces that are protective of their entitlements to voice and basic rights. As Beckman and Jega have reminded us, the actions of societal institutions and movements become relevant to democratization, first of all, if and when they contest relations of domination within their own fields of operation. It is important that we continue to analyze the impact of global marginalization(s), economic privations, state repression and the vibrant counter-culture of resistance on the democratization process. The facilitation of voice is a salient aspect of democratization as it embraces the “emergence of counter-narratives that are crucial for the democratization of various sites in society” and addresses the forms of
silencing that makes communities and individuals subject to theories and processes in which discrimination and oppression are 'natural' outcomes of a search for economic growth and global competition.

The process toward such end-goals is strewn with major constraints but such challenges must be viewed in tandem with the irrepressible vitality of the socio-political landscape. In this light, volatility is not necessarily evidence of deviance or the failure of popular democratic ethos, but is often embedded within the democratizing trajectory of the nation and projected in response to surrounding socio-economic contexts, needs and pressures. Together, these realities offer a compelling argument for the success of serious efforts to construct the requisite scaffolding that will effectively anchor the political processes underway in several African countries toward the rule of just law, political accountability, popular participation, restructuring of power relations and socio-economic empowerment.

**Notes**

3. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 344.
9. Ibid., 344-5.
11. Fantu Cheru notes the linkages between civil society and democracy, but insists that further research is required to answer questions such as; “Is the vibrancy of independent social movements an indication of the growth and development of a strong and viable civil society that can serve as a base


15. Ibid., 17.

16. Ibid., 4. They argued then that the growing consensus holds that Africa's economic stagnation can be explained by six key factors which include: inadequate human, technological and institutional capacities; economic policy distortions; the undiversified and dependent character of African economies; political instability; deficiencies in 'governance'; and inattention to poverty alleviation. While such a position might apparently not regard the lack of genuinely democratic systems as a major hindrance to economic renewal except as it prevents the creation of an enabling environment for economic growth, other studies indicate otherwise.


19. Ibid.


21. That the end of the cold war was perceived to be the dawn of Africa's chance for independent statehood surely requires no repetition. This theme was undiluted by the 'pessimists' who bemoaned the loss of Africa's geo-strategic bargaining card. See Michael Clough, Free at last? U.S Policy towards Africa and the End of the Cold War, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1992) and Donald Rothchild, "The United States and Conflict Management in Africa," in Africa in World Politics, eds. Harbeson and Rothchild.

22. Confidential interview with a business executive cited in Thomas Callaghy, Africa and the World Political Economy: Still Caught Between a Rock and


27. Jean-Christophe Servant reports that except for the Sudanese oilfields, Africa’s reserves are just opposite the east coast of the US. The Chad–Cameroon pipeline will carry a further 250,000 barrels a day to the Atlantic. US oil companies, particularly the two giants Exxon-Mobil and Chevron-Texaco, and operators such as Amerada Hess, Marathon and Ocean Energy, will invest billions in African oil. See Ibid.


29. US Congressman Royce spoke of “exporting security arrangements to protect offshore energy resources in selected ECOMOG countries”; Congressman William Jefferson (D–Louisiana) of the Africa congressional Sub-Committee stated that, “these [African] countries are not averse to having us


35. See Ndulu and Van de Walle, 14.


38. Osvaldo Sunkel’s struggle to reconcile warring impulses is reflective of the dilemma of many scholars and activists today. See Osvaldo Sunkel, “The view from Latin America in Whose World Order” in Whose World Order, 54.


41 Ibid.


45. Ouisseina Alidou, “Booker T. Washington in Africa: Between Education and (Re)Colonization,” in A Thousand Flowers: Social Struggles against Struc-
Democratic Scaffolding for a Globalizing Age


50. Stephen Buckley, ”Authority’s Changing Face in Africa”.


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64. Ibid., 144.
65. Ibid.
67. Ibid., 127.
69. In an exploration of the connection between economic reform and the transition to democracy, Robinson utilized the experiences of three countries, South Korea, Chile and Ghana, to draw partial yet instructive conclusions. In all three cases, there was a similar sequence of economic reform followed by political liberalization. Based on this, he contended that the process of economic reform, especially when it takes place over a protracted period and achieves the desired economic goals, creates the conditions in which political liberalization becomes possible. Yet he cautions that this process is conditioned by the political calculations of the incumbent regime (an unpredictable factor), the power of the opposition, and the outcome of external pressure. Consequently, it should not be concluded from the case studies that there will always be a direct relationship between economic reform and political liberalization since a highly specific set of circumstances prevailed in the three countries reviewed. Indeed, the interaction of historical or short-term conditions and structural factors influence the nature, pace and consequences of change. See William I. Robinson, “Globalization, the World System and Democracy Promotion” in U.S. Foreign Policy, Theory and Society, 25(5) October 1996, 625.
71. The polyarchic definition argues that democracy rests exclusively on process so that there is no contradiction between a "democratic" process and a social order punctuated by sharp social inequalities and minority monopolization of society's material and cultural resources. Thus, under the polyarchic definition, a system can acquire a democratic form without democratic content or outcomes. See William I. Robinson, “Globalization, the World System, and Democracy Promotion” in U.S. Foreign Policy, Theory and Society, 25(5) October 1996, 625; see also Julius Ihonvbere's call to genuine democratization in Africa, “Evolving Sovereignty in an Interdependent World: the Challenge of Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa,” International Politics 33, 1996, 245-268.
74. Ibid., 73.


81. The data was compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the basis of information provided by National Parliaments by 30 November 2005. 187 countries are classified by descending order of the percentage of women in the lower or upper House. Women in National Parliaments 2005 Charts, http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm#1.


