Session 7:

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Quotation 1

"The multi-party system has nothing to do with democracy, and there are perfectly democratic African countries, like Côte d'Ivoire, which are single-party countries where democracy is exercised within that single party." "The multi-party system is a kind of luxury that these developing countries cannot afford."

Jacques Chirac, Abidjan, February 1990

Quotation 2

"We bled Africa for four and a half centuries. Then we plundered its raw materials; after that, we said: they (the Africans) are good for nothing. In the name of religion, we destroyed their culture and now that things must be done with greater finesse, we're using scholarships to drain their brains. Then we see that poor Africa isn't doing so great, it's not producing elites. After enriching ourselves at their expense, we're lecturing them."

Jacques Chirac, Yaoundé, January 2001.

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Introduction

- Winds of change blew across the continent
- But change in power is not always synonymous with change in governance
- The La Baule Speech (June 1990) and imposition of democracy: No French aid without democratization
- Many people invoke the concept but very few understand it well: a work in progress rather than a finished product
- 2,500 years ago, *Demos*, i.e. "the People," were vested with *kratos*, "Authority"
- But there was never a consensus on the definition
- *Democracy*: a fairly simple political system in which the people are consulted at all times.

Conceptual Definition

- **The big idea: the right of the people to choose or reject their leaders, periodically, in full political freedom, without coercion**

- **Democracy in opposition to Oligarchy, Monarchy, Tyranny and Aristocracy**

- **Since Antiquity, people have disagreed over the essential elements/components of democracy**

- **One thing in dispute was the definition of the term "people"**

- **Women, children, slaves and the poor were not allowed to vote…**

- **The issue of the model and the exercise of government was something else in dispute**

- **Did it have to be direct, liberal, representative or constitutional democracy?**

- **But the works of the various philosophers of democracy helped to modernize its components, limits and strengths.**

Democracy: a Disputed Concept

- Greek thinkers were rather hostile toward Athenian democracy

- Democracy as a representative system seems obvious today

- But the idea has long been viewed as a contradiction in terms

- Several thinkers have spoken up to criticize democracy (Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, Hobbes, Rousseau…)

- Abraham Lincoln: "Government of the people by the people for the people" Gettysburg, November 19, 1863

- Duverger begs to differ: pretty words that don't mean a whole lot

- In spite of its faults, democracy incarnates certain universal values

- According to Churchill: democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.

Debate over "African" Democracy

- **Traditional political system in Africa: Symbiosis between the leader and the led: Co-management of society**

- **Ubuntu: *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (South Africa)**

- **Kurunkan Fuga (Mandinka Empire, 1236)**

- **Ake: Democracy must reflect African realities (1993)**

- **Austin: it must derive from African experiences (1993)**

- **Mazrui: Democracy as an instrumental right and a fundamental right : right to vote and consent to be governed**

- **Also according to Mazrui, distinguish between democracy as a means and democracy as a goal**

- **Incompatibility between democracy and African culture: Considering the specific features of Africa.**

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Challenges to Democracy in Africa

- Ihonvbere questions the authenticity of democracy in Africa: no real change in institutions

- Adejumobi maintains that as long as elections are the sole criterion, African democracy will not progress

- Setting up a socio-economic environment that can support democratization

- Rule of law and effective separation of powers

- Is Africa at the threshold of another false start?

- Fortunately, there is some good news: the works of Gyimah-Boadi (2004) and *Afrobarometer* give hope

- Demand for democracy in Africa is very strong, even though the Africans' choice is not always respected

- Reintroducing democratic culture on the continent.

Current Situation

- Democracy in retreat or "Growing Pains"?

- The quality of political participation, the rule of law and capability of the State in decline

- "Legal" return of the principle of the President for life /until death

- Gradual reduction in the ability of governments to form a consensus, curb corruption and use resources effectively

- From hope to despair in many countries

- But there are some positive points: strong opposition in some countries and incipient democracy in others

- Holding elections regularly and on time

- Elections: a necessary condition but not enough.

Conclusion

- After the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the steam roller eased up a bit and many took that as true change

- But gradually, Africans saw their delusions: Old wine in new bottles

- In many countries, power did not really change hands

- Through their skillful maneuvering and especially with support from their foreign "friends," the old guard have basically been able to stay atop their "throne"

- Africa has actually found itself in the hands of a *Democratorship*: crypto-dictatorship camouflaged in the trappings of democracy

- And yet there is reason for hope, but hope is not a strategy: Africans must stay vigilant.

"A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization"
Aimé Césaire (1913-2008)

Questions, Comments and Suggestions?

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