Democracy, Civil Society and Governance in Africa
By : Archie Mafeje

1998

1.   *Preamble*

Terms such as "democracy" and "civil society" have a very long history, going as far back as classical Greece. But, as would be readily acknowledged, their connotations are socially – and historically – determined i.e. each social epoch raises particular questions about human conditions and the value of social existence. These are normative issues and as such are highly debatable within any society and among different societies in space and time. In intellectual discourse the conjuncture of the former and the latter has almost intractable philosophical implications. Can the local be derived from the "universal" or can the local in its own right reflect the "universal"? Since the introduction of "pattern variables" by Talcott Parsons (1951) it has always been assumed that as societies advance "particularism" will be supplanted by "universalism." The presuppositions underlying the current notion of "globalization" would seem to confirm this belief. Conceivably, this could be a case of one man's bread is another man's poison. Attempts by the West to homogenise all values are being resisted by the majority of the people in the Third World. This manifests itself in a variety of nationalisms against what is seen as western imperialism. While this inevitably involves power relations and economic exploitation, increasingly it impinges on cosmological questions, being in one's universe.

Although the latter might dwell in the realm of the metaphysical, it is a very short step from the metaphysical to the philosphical. For instance, does democracy mean freedom; or is "human rights" a celebration of anthropology of all humanity or is it self-glorification by the West at its moment of absolute triumph, an affirmation of its discretionary power which allows it to pick and choose in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, South Africa, the Congo, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Palestine, Afghanistan and now Kosovo? Apart from the obvious political implications and unmistakable cynicism, this is an indication that these concepts, despite their universalistic pretensions, are subject to more than one interpretation i.e. they are subject to manipulation. This is part of the problem with which independent thinking intellectuals have to contend. Fraudulent and hypocritical interventions must be exposed for double standards cannot at the same time serve as a basis for universal claims. Indeed, even without such duplicity, it is very doubtful philosophically if at the level of values there can be any universalism. It is significant that the leaders of the "free world," namely, the Americans, unabashedly justify committing atrocities outside the West by putting a premium on their values and way of life. Far from affirming any kind of universalism, this pits one universe against all other.

The above implies not only a clash of values but also political confrontation. In the normal run of things political confrontation inevitably leads to negotiations and setting of minimum standards of behavior among all concerned, as is exemplified by the UN or the Human Rights Tribunal in The Hague. While purporting to represent universal moral principles, even such codes of conduct are not by any means an epitome of universalism.   In Somalia under the auspices of the UN American, Italian, Belgian, and Canadian forces behaved abominably with impunity. In contrast, in the isolated cases where the reverse occurred there were strong protests from the West. It transpires, therefore, that, despite the internationally recognized codes of conduct, the human rights or lives of some are worth more than others.

Thus, while universal declarations are a form of entitlement, their realization is very much subject to relative power. The West (Americans in particular) does not only treat its type of democracy as a universal principle but also arrogates to itself the moral right to impose it on others when it suits it politically. A number of autocratic rulers in Africa, the Middle East,

and Latin America have been (and still are) sustained by the west under the leadership of the United States, in spite of the wishes of their citizens. It matters very little that after the fact, say, the Americans apologize with great contrition like Clinton. At issue here is the credibility of their democratic pretensions universally. However, this practical consideration, important as it is, should not be allowed to obscure the fundamental question of whether there could be a universal concept of democracy. Or is the hullabaloo about universal democracy since the fall of the Soviet Union a stratagem used by the West to reproduce itself ideologically?

Answers to these questions will vary accordingly to ideological orientation. However, if historical and cultural predispositions are anything to go by, it is extremely doubtful if there could ever be a universal concept of democracy. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the fact that present and past societies influence one another i.e. there is no absolute dividing line between "universal" and "local" history, as conventionally understood. This is particularly true, if we take into account historical phenomena such as colonialism and imperialism. Those on the receiving end cannot help adapting to the imperatives of the imposing forces and intrusive values. Whether this is referred to as "acculturation", "civilization", "westernization", or "selective borrowing", it never wipes the slate clean. Local modes of thought and behavior persist in one way or another.

The tendency is usually strongest among the least transnationalized members of the given communities or among those who consciously rebel against imposition. In Gramscian terms the former would refer to "civil society" and the latter to "organic intellectuals". Of course, these terms are not self-evident. Consequently, over the last fifteen years or so they have been hotly debated among African scholars, along with the concept of "democracy". It is interesting to note that African creative writers have no problem in finding civil societies in what is anachronistically called "traditional societies" (Mafeje, 1997). In contrast, African political analyst find it difficult to locate the so-called civil society in what is otherwise fragmented social formations in which "ethnicity" is believed to be endemic. This might be a sign of their inability to see the wood for the trees due to the persistent use of received designated categories. Recourse to representations by African scholars themselves will make apparent some of the theoretical and political problems raised in the foregoing remarks.

2.   *African Perspectives on Democracy*

It was not until the intensification of popular struggles for democracy in the 1980s that African scholars turned their attention specifically to the question of democracy on the continent. Before this most had been preoccupied with development issues such as "dependency", capitalism versus socialism, class-formation, and the role of workers and peasants in development. All these topics lent themselves to grand theories which tended to draw away the attention of African intellectuals from people's everyday struggles. This is not to say there was lack of awareness of the growing disillusionment with "independence" among ordinary people since the 1970s but that their struggles had not yet assumed dramatic proportions, as they did in the 1980s. By the end of the decade, they had gathered so much momentum that not only did they catch the imagination of intellectuals but, more importantly, swept into the dust-bin of history a number of self-styled "presidents for life" in Africa. Probably, this is what inspired the collective effort by African scholars entitled Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa edited by Peter Anyang' Nyong'o (1987) as well as the CODESRIA research project on "Social Movements, Social transformation and the Struggle

for Democracy in Africa" launched in 1988. No longer was it assumed that the state and its incumbents had the monopoly of political initiative.

The popular movement for democracy in Africa revolved around three major demands: a) abolition of the one-party state in favor of democratic pluralism; b) decentralization of power i.e. greater local autonomy; and c) respect for human rights and the rule of law by African governments. This was not simply an expression of general disillusionment with independence whose leaders had failed to deliver but a revulsion against African governments which had become unbearably autocratic and oppressive. Yet, it comes as not surprise that African governments had become progressively oppressive and their presidents had turned into ruthless dictators. Not only had they failed to deliver but also after 20 years of independence their countries had overwhelmingly fallen into a political abyss. Due largely to their own doing, their economies had been plunged into the deepest crisis ever. This, in turn, elicited an economically perverse but politically expedient reaction from the ruling elites, namely, to defend their profligacy by denying the ordinary citizens the right to protect themselves against the implicit but illegitimate financial squeeze.

The ensuing financial crisis created a situation where dog ate dog. Not only did this spell doom for the poor in Africa whose share in the total of the world poor rose from 16% in the 1960s to 35% in the mid-1980s and is expected to reach two-thirds of the African population by the year 2000 (World Bank, 1990) but also engendered fierce competition among the different factions of the elite. Only those closest to the president (civilian or military) could be assured of survival. Put in a nutshell, not only were African petit-bourgeois governments fast losing any legitimacy but also the political base of incumbent presidents had shrunk to a narrow circle of trusted friends, kinsmen, and clansmen (note even "ethnic groups" in their totality, as "ethnicity" theorists presuppose). Short of use of massive naked power, such decrepit regimes were vulnerable to any large-scale political upheaval from below.

However, it is important to note that the ordinary citizens who were responsible for what became knows as "the popular movement for democracy in Africa" knew exactly what they were objecting to, but they did not know with the same clarity what they wanted. Thus, their popular slogans were open to conflicting interpretations, depending on who the interlocutors were. For instance, objections to one-party autocracy got interpreted as "multi-party democracy", democratic pluralism got construed as "liberal democracy", and local autonomy as "participatory democracy", which got associated with "development", without saying what type of development. This is a clear indication that the people's struggles for democracy were liable to perversion or appropriation by more articulate interlocutors who ranged from imperialist agents, liberals of all sorts, to intellectual opportunists. This is probably inevitable under certain determinate conditions such as uneven development. Even so, its historical significance is that it creates grounds for a socially-informed debate among all protagonists. The great debates that took place among African intellectuals from 1986 to date testify to this. Therefore, it might be instructive to review some of these debates so as to put into perspective current thinking.

It is fair to state that before the mid-1980s African scholars were not unduly worried about the "one-party state" or *"parti unique"* but more about the failure of the African state to deliver what had been promised at independence, namely, freedom from oppression and exploitation which were the hallmark of the colonial state. These issues were more substantive than formal. As was mentioned earlier, discussions about "democracy" *per se* in Africa did not feature until the later half of the 1980s. Prior to this, there must have been an underlying

belief that willing African leaders such as Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Modibo Keita, Nyerere and a few others who belonged to what became known as the "Monrovia Group" could bring independence to its fruition, irrespective of whether they were advocates of the "one-party state" or not. What mattered most was the direction in which the *independence movement* was heading. This made sense because by all accounts the *independence movement* was a *popular* movement. It was when this popular will was being perverted that this began to turn sour. It is, therefore, not surprising that Peter Anyang' Nyong'o used this as their point of departure in their pioneering study in 1987.

As will be recalled, his two related theses were: a) the disintegration of the national alliance that led to independence ushered a phase of dictatorships in Africa (personal dictatorships even at that); and b) the resultant lack of democracy in Africa is the root-cause of the lack of development in Africa, i.e. there cannot be development in Africa without democracy. These are the original formulations by Anyang' Nyong'o and it is worth being faithful to them because they are as controversial as they are bold. Initially, Anyang's assertions did not provoke a debate on democracy as such in Africa but rather on the relationship between "democracy" and "development". It is obvious that in the spirit of the independence movement Anyang' was less interested in elaborating a formal definition of "democracy" but more in determining the extent to which the general populace was *free to participate* in national reconstruction and thus guarantee development.

While having no tract with African dictators, by treating democracy as serviceable to "development" he perhaps unwittingly detracted from his own sense of democracy. In fact, he was accused of "instrumentalism" by Mkandawire (1989) who argued that "democracy" was a right and a value in itself whether it brought about development or not. Furthermore, Mkandawire succeeded in undermining Anyang's postulate by citing historical cases such as Germany, Japan, and, more recently, the South East Asian countries where development occurred, without any real democracy – meaning albeit vaguely liberal democracy. In response Anyang' stretched his argument to a breaking point by offering Kenya and Cote d'Ivoire as two countries in sub-Saharan Africa which achieved development precisely because they maintained a certain modicum of democracy. Here, Anyang' was skating on thin ice for it is a well-known fact that the two successive regimes in Kenya were not only repressive but also murderous and that Houphouet-Boigney's achieving autocracy in Cote d'Ivoire was, if not murderous, authoritarian and repressive. By the time he reached Malawi, the "African miracle," Anyang's mini-democracy had all but evaporated for even he could hardly say anything in mitigation concerning Banda's autocratic, oppressive and murderous regime. As will be shown later, this does not dispose of the problem of the relationship between "democracy" and "development," depending on how either of the two is defined.

In rejecting Anyang's "instrumentalism" Mkandawire insisted that democracy is an absolute value. But in the course of his presentation he relativised his concept of democracy by submitting that "liberal democracy" is better than nothing – a not uncommon argument but probably mistaken in principle. What would have been germane to his argument is to surmise what would constitute absolute democracy under the determinate conditions in Africa. "Liberal democracy" is of a type, a thing in itself and we cannot be presumed to have more or less of it. This is one of the errors committed by western apologists in describing apartheid South Africa as a "democracy" compared to the rest of Africa. One striking thing is that it was never said what kind of democracy, except by Heribert Adam (1971) who described it as "racial democracy", a contradiction in terms. Logically, it is inevitable that anything

measured against nothing is something.   Presumably, "nothing" is what prevailed in the rest of Africa.

This is simply pure mystification because it obscures what became true presence in post-independence Africa, namely, repression and exploitation.   This applies with even greater force to apartheid or "racial democracy" in South Africa.   Acknowledgment of this leads to the recognition of the fact that democracy and repression are antithetical i.e. they cannot co-exit.   By implication neither is partial or divisible.   This has to be so because in talking about democracy or its absence our point of reference is society at large.   It is characterization of the terms of social interaction in a given society at a given stage of its development.   Not only does this mean that democracy refers to the nature of prevailing relations in society but also is a statement about those social relations which played a leading role in shaping society i.e. it is socially – and historically – determined.

The last explication in the above paragraph might appear platitudinous but it has very profound implications for Africa where democracy is often thought of as exogenous and independent of local history, as is exemplified by conventional discussions about "liberal democracy" in Africa.   Although in the "developmentalists" phase of the discourse on democracy in Africa, advocacy was limited to "popular participation", as the debate intensified, a number of African scholars unable to offer new or authentic meanings reverted to the "better than nothing" position.   In the wake of increasingly rampant despotism and shameless abrogation of rule of law on the continent, and the traumatic collapse of "socialist democracy" in Eastern Europe, a significant number of African scholars began to celebrate "liberal democracy" for lack of an alternative.   The latter must be emphasized because it created grounds for pragmatism and legitimized ad hoc arguments.

For instance, instead of maintaining the discourse on the conceptual plane, a number of protagonists began to fasten on single items such as the four classical freedoms, the right to opposition, and rule of law.   Involved in this juristical liberalism were noted radical African scholars such as Mkandarwire, Gutto, Mamdani, and Mandaza.   In fact, Manadaza (1990) and Anyang' (1990) who were (and still are) actively engaged in politics took Shivji to task for pooh-poohing liberal democracy under the prevailing conditions in Africa.   As it turns out, Shivji's fears were not unfounded since experience in countries such as Kenya, Zambia, Lesotho, and Sierra Leon has shown that a formal declaration of all the prerequisites for western democracy does not necessarily realize "liberal democracy."   So far, it has created opportunities for a bloody circulation of elites in the best known cases.   This is what Shivji (1990) contemptuously referred to as "compradorial democracy" to the irritation of his more pragmatic colleagues, who in his opinion were being influenced by "fashionable bandwagons" of the West.   However clumsily conceptualized or dogmatically stated, Shivji's case was vindicated by the fact that in the new "democratization" in Africa the popular masses who initiated the process got usurped or their movement got hijacked by their class enemies and "liberal democracy" remained a sham.

3.   *Liberalism or Social Democracy*

As would be expected, this provoked yet another confrontation between African scholars which became more polarized between what might be called the *left* and the *right*.   While such categorizations are often risky, at times they help to throw everything into relief and to stop antagonists from shilly-shallying.   The debate of the late 1980s among African scholars represented in actuality a disagreement within the left about political priorities and strategies

rather than ideological preferences. What followed in the early 1990s revealed underlying cleavages among African scholars. It also showed that CODESRIA, the major intellectual forum in which debates on "democracy" in Africa took place, was not as homogeneous as has been supposed by its detractors. Incensed in particular by Shivji's denunciation of liberalism in his 1988 article where he chastised his fellow-leftists for indulging in "unabashed celebration of *LIBERALISM*', Jibrin Ibrahim published a scathing attack on the African left in CODESRIA Bulletin No. 1, 1993 under the title, "History as Iconoclast: Left Stardom and the Debate on Democracy."

Not only did his article represent a confrontation between right and left in the CODESRIA circles but also a generation gap, as he identified the anti-liberal tendency with "icons". These turned out to be some senior African scholars among whom were included Samir Amin, Archie Mafeje, Claude Ake, Mahmmood Mamdani, Issa Shivji himself, and Ernest Wamba dia Wamba. All were presumed to be Marxists and all stood condemned for "having spent too much of their intellectual careers demolishing liberalism" and for having failed to recognize the fact that "what they had 'demolished' in the past could have some democratic credentials today." While it is true that the African scholars in question would not credit "liberal democracy" at this historical juncture and under the objective conditions in Africa, it is not true that they advocated Soviet "socialist democracy", instead. Furthermore, as was shown earlier, some members of the radical left in Africa, including at least one "icon", Mamdani, were willing to credit liberal democracy in the absence of anything better in Africa. However, this largely begged the question, as we have instances of liberal democracy in countries such as South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and others where the lot of the mass of the people has remained the same i.e. neither "participatory democracy" nor better access to means of livelihood has been achieved. Thus, it is yet to be proved that the "icons" were simply victims of their own vintage preconceptions.

Although Jibrin Ibrahim for polemical reasons found it convenient to cast his chosen anti-liberal "icons" into one pail, this was nothing less than a caricature for among them there were some subtle but theoretically interesting differences which could not be fitted into binary opposites. In addition to the supposed opposition between liberals and Marxists, there was a third and, perhaps more interesting dimension, namely, radical African nationalism. Among the indicated "icons", this was best manifested in Wamba dia Wamba's and Claude Ake's representations. Whereas Ibrahim derived pleasure in lampooning Claude Ake as "another Universalist Marxist", Ake was nothing of the sort. His anti-liberalsim stemmed from a different inspiration. In his last testimony Claude Ake (1996) reaffirmed his belief that ". . . Africa requires something more than the impoverished liberal democracy that prevails in the industrialized countries" (129). His stated reason for outright rejection of liberal democracy is that it is "inimical to the idea of the people having effective decisionmaking power". In contradistinction, he advocated: "A social democracy that places emphasis on concrete political, social, and economic rights, as opposed to liberal democracy that emphasizes abstract political rights" (132). Unlike in his earlier statement (1991) he stopped short of invoking certain predisposing "societal characteristics" in Africa. In the above trajectory there is nothing "universalist" or "Marxist". However, it was left to Wamba dia Wamba to carry this Afrocentric perspective to its logical conclusion by calling for an African democracy that relied on traditional mechanisms such as village palavers and lineage assemblies. This could be one version of "popular democracy" and "local autonomy". But we need to guard against reversion to the past with all its pitfalls or relapse into uncritical cultural revivalism. In our view social democracy, which is the burning issue everywhere in

the world today, whether it be in ailing Asia, disintegrating Eastern Europe, decaying Middle East, crisis – ridden Africa, drifting Latin-America, or in imperialist western Europe, is what is at stake. Since social democracy refers to equitable distribution of power and means of livelihood among all members of society, it is amenable to local determinations and mechanisms for implementation. Under the present conditions where human development indices have been scientifically elaborated, it is highly researchable and measurable, unlike liberal or bureaucratic "socialist" formalism. Historically and conceptually, social democracy has as its referent people and their well-being as citizens. In contemporary African history this was best expressed in the demands of the "popular movement for democracy", namely, freedom from oppression, material deprivation, and bureaucratic imposition. This presupposes that there is community existence outside the state and its bureaucracy. Elsewhere, this would be referred to as "civil society". But, owing to the fragmentation of African social formations, there have been arguments about whether there exists especially in sub-Saharan Africa a single community of interests which could be conceived of as a counterweight to the state. The issue has been rendered even more difficult to resolve by seemingly historically-determined community schisms and what in common parlance is called "ethnicity". The disintegration of the independence movement which represented an alliance of various African peoples (not so much of classes as was implied by Anyang') thrown together by historical accident, namely, colonialism seemed to confirm this perception of contemporary Africa. The "tribalistic" anthropology of Africa made all this appear natural and inevitable. Without subscribing to any theories of "ethnicity" in Africa, the observable fragmentation of African social formations bred skepticism in all of us. Yet, this was sociologically unjustified because right in front of our eyes African civil societies had dramatically demonstrated their existence and potency in the form of the "popular movement for democracy" which toppled several dictatorships in Africa. If there appears to be a lull since the days of "constituency assemblies", continuing resistance against perversion of liberal democracy in countries such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, the Congo etc., etc., is a sign of the viability of African civil societies. Also, the revival of pan-Africanism outside governmental structures is symptomatic.

4.   *Civil Society*

The term, "civil society", is used loosely to refer to a diffuse collective existence outside formally organized structures such as the state, official parties, the church and, presumably, trade unions, NGOs, youth and women's organizations. But one is inclined to think that popular organizations such as the latter four, while not civil society in themselves, are part of civil society. Gramsci, who popularized the term, had serious problems both in locating it in space and in defining it with some precision. He thought of it as an "ensemble of private interests" located somewhere between the "economic structure" and the "super-structure" by which he meant public life and the state. Gramsci's distinction between an "ensemble of private interests" and "public life" would seem invalid. There is nothing private about an alliance of popular organizations. Indeed, in discussing what became one of his lasting contributions, the notion of "hegemony", he refers to "those alliances which enjoy the greatest ideological resonance in society at a given time". But then, he gives the Roman Catholic Church in Italy as an example. Once again, here Gramsci is out of order. The church in itself and by itself cannot be referred to as an "alliance".

What would be more pertinent is to recognize the church as part of civil society since the separation of state and church in Christian Europe. This proposition receives great confirmation from the Latin-American and African social experience, not withstanding the

fact that the church in Europe has remained largely part of the establishment. In Latin-America and Africa, as is shown by its involvement in popular struggles, the church has become an important part of civil society and is often at loggerheads with tyrannical regimes in both regions. In this sense hegemony is not given to the state but contested between it and civil society. Obviously, the relative strength between the two determines the outcome. In countries where the civil society is cohesive and its organs well-organized, the prospects for social democracy are greater. In Africa, where the civil society is still inchoate, it is relatively easy to usurp. However, what is interesting is that while intellectuals talk about "liberal democracy" and some politicians pay lip-service to it, the pressure for social democracy, as we defined it, is greatest in civil society. This is clearest in the case of South Africa which, probably, has the strongest civil society in sub-Saharan Africa. Similar pressures are being felt in countries such as Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia and Lesotho which, theoretically, had adopted liberal democracy. Thus, we should expect that, as disillusionment grows, civil society is going to insist more on substance than on form. This will be a mark of its growing maturity.

5. *"Good Governance": The Ultimate Illusion*

Since the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes, there has been a great deal of talk about "good governance" in Africa. It is certain that this concept was introduced by the international agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF and became part of their "conditionality" and other donors. Secondly, there is no doubt that it has nothing to do with democracy of any kind because if by it is meant good management of public affairs, probity, and rectitude, then this is no distinguishing characteristic of any government since even the most authoritarian regimes can meet these requirements. Worst still, if international agencies such as the World Bank, IMF, and donor countries such as the United States, France, Belgium, Britain, and Germany meant what they preach, we would not be able to explain why tyrants such as Mobutu, Banda, Bokassa, Adedema, Habyarimana, Lebowa Jonathan, Moi (until very recently), and the successive military dictators in Nigeria received not only plenty of aid from the West but also great political patronage. Indeed, the conditionality of the World Bank and IMF favored more authoritarian regimes than populist ones and in practice proved to be extremely anti-social. Therefore, in their hands the concept of "good governance" should be regarded as an invitation to authoritarianism and a negation of prospects for social democracy.

Otherwise, as is used by conventional political scientists, the concept is nothing more than a platitude, a commonplace remark solemnly delivered to no avail. It is also by any logic tautological as well as contradictory. It stands to reason that there can be no "good governance", without democracy i.e. democracy is a guarantee for a good, if it is guilty of bad governance. In reality "bad governance" is no governance and signifies the end of government and a threatened or a total collapse, as is happening now in a number of African countries. In the absence of democracy, of government, and threatened disintegration of the state in countries such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Somalia, Algeria, Chad, Sudan, Kenya, and so on, how can we speak of "good governance"? To whom is the question addressed? Can we address it to those who are responsible for the cataclysm, without putting ourselves in a political void or betraying ourselves as "organic intellectuals"? Discredited African governments with no legitimacy should not be given respectability and a longer lease of life, as the leading imperialist countries and donor agencies having been doing so far covertly or overtly.

6.   *Shanghaied Organic Intellectuals*

It is apparent that, even though we got caught up in it through CODESRIA as part of the fashionable western bandwagon, "good governance" is neither meaningful nor implementable, outside the fundamental issue of social democracy in Africa and else where. The "popular democratic movement" in Africa has already given the correct verdict but not the correct implementation. Then, the question is why? I believe that this question is eminently researchable. We have examples of repeated and dismal failure in Kenya, Zambia, and former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). It is easy but natural to blame the enemies of "democracies". But could this be attributable to inherent weaknesses in the movement itself and its launching pad, civil society. Answers to this question will vary from country to country and that is why we need specific research.   Fortunately, in each immediately relevant case we have on the ground engaged organic intellectuals such as Peter Anyang' Nyong'o in Kenya, Gilbert Mudenda in Zambia, Earnest Wamba dia Wamba and Jacques Delpechin in the Congo, and Paulin Hountondji in Benin – to mention just a few well-know examples. Have they been able to put this squarely on our research agenda or have they also been detracted by current fads "made in the USA"? It is obvious that Afrocentric research on democracy and civil society is still wanting mainly because research agendas and their pace are not necessarily determined by the Africans themselves, as we have shown. There are well-known objective reasons for this. But CODESRIA has clearly demonstrated that with a certain amount of commitment and organization African scholars, disadvantaged as they are, can seize the initiative. This is part of the struggle and is self-imposing, if we truly believe in self-liberation.   Nevertheless, commitment and organization, without independent thinking and the requisite intellectual imagination, cannot suffice. In the 1980s we got saddled with Elliot Berg's "Agenda for Africa" (meaning the Structural Adjustment Programmes), in the last 10 years we got smothered with "ethnicity" and "good governance", and is obvious that as we approach the new millenium we are going to be plunged into "poverty alleviation" while at the same time being inducted into a veritable jamboree celebrating "globalization." I recommend that our line of defense against such externally-contrived distractions should be to insist on proactive, critical, and reflexive research, instead of being reactive or swayed by universalistic effusions of fancy.

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