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Democracy in Africa  
Achievements  
& Prospects

Most people with an interest in African politics have probably at some time or other been party to a discussion about the extent to which democracy ever existed in Africa in pre-colonial times. During the days of one-party rule, it was indeed quite common to hear apologists for ruling parties assert that in Africa there existed a tradition of communal organization and government by consensus in which notions of permanent minorities and majorities were quite foreign.<sup>1</sup>

These days it is quite easy to comment decisively on this sort of assertion regarding pre-colonial Africa. Professional historians of the last 40 years or so have performed a considerable feat in illuminating aspects of African history which were previously regarded as unknown and even unrecoverable. We now have quite a good idea of the general outlines – and sometimes much more than that – of the continent's history over the last couple of thousand years.<sup>2</sup> Before colonial government was imposed upon it, mostly in the second half of the nineteenth century, Africa had a great variety of political systems, including so-called stateless societies, kingdoms, military dictatorships and other arrangements. Which of these, if any, could be called democratic depends crucially on one's definition of 'democracy'. One thing, however, is absolutely clear: there are abundant examples of pre-colonial African polities in which the rule of law obtained and the various rights and obligations of both rulers and ruled were defined by constitutions. At a time when very few Africans were literate, such constitutions were not, of course, generally written, but they existed nonetheless. We can, therefore, state with confidence that the concept of constitutional government, in which the power of the executive is subject to rules and in which governors are accountable for their actions to representatives of other elements in society, is old in Africa. Constitutional government is therefore not a modern import from elsewhere. If we define the word 'democracy' as it is generally understood in modern Europe and North America, to mean the activity of two or more political parties competing for power within the framework of a nation-state by means of periodic elections for which the whole adult population is eligible, then democracy did not exist either in Africa or Europe until the twentieth century, although its institutional origins in Europe may clearly be traced to earlier times. Let us recall that women acquired the right to vote in Britain, for example, only in 1918.

Although it is interesting to refer to pre-colonial African history with a view to identifying the various constitutional arrangements which existed before European colonization, such inquiry is of only limited relevance in establishing whether or not particular forms of government are authentically African. For as the French scholar Jean-François Bayart has eloquently argued,<sup>3</sup> Africa has assimilated both the colonial and modern periods into its own history. Forms of government which may originally have been imposed by force, or which may in some sense be considered aberrant or degenerate forms of their original model, have become part of Africa's historical fabric. Modern Africans, like other people, live with the heritage of their past.

In point of fact, even in its conventional modern sense, democracy existed in Africa before the late 1980s. Most of French-speaking Africa, for example, knew multi-party activity, in competition to elect representatives to the National Assembly in Paris, between 1945 and 1960. Many British colonies also had multi-party activity before, and for some years after, the declarations of independence. The era of one-party rule in Africa really began only in the mid-1960s. Even then, some countries, such as Botswana and The Gambia, never adopted one-party systems at all, or, in the case of Senegal, returned to a multi-party system at an early stage.<sup>4</sup> Even at the height of the one-party era there were attempts to establish opposition parties, such as the *Mouvement de redressement national* (MORENA) in Gabon, which was crushed in 1981-2.<sup>5</sup> One could also cite the short-lived multi-party systems which were created in Ghana, Nigeria and Sudan in the 1970s and 1980s, or various attempts in Cameroon to revive the *Union des Populations du Cameroun*. Thus, while it is reasonably accurate to refer to the period from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s as the age of one-party states in Africa, it is important to bear in mind that there existed a memory of formal multi-party systems and that there were important attempts to revive or restore such systems before the current wave of democratization.

Recent works by leading Africanist scholars have thrown considerable light on the workings of African governments and states since independence, and provide us with a better literature than previously for analysing current developments.<sup>6</sup> These recent works have the merit of not only examining and reinterpreting the recent history of Africa, but also of emphasizing that Africa's politics are best analysed in the same terms as are usually applied to the politics of any other continent, by using such universal notions as sovereignty, nationality, civil society and political accountability. In recent years the most penetrating insights into Africa's current situation have come from this approach rather than from emphasizing Africa's 'otherness'. As well as reading the best anthropological and historical literature available, analysts of modern African politics find much of relevance in the works of Machiavelli, de Tocqueville, Gramsci and others.

### ✧ The Origins of Current Democratization in Africa

Taking these considerations into account, it is possible to make some broad generalizations about both the longer-term and the more immediate reasons for the rapid demise of the one-party state in Africa and its replacement in many places by a formal multi-party system of a type which many people in Europe and North America

instinctively label 'democracy'. One of the most pressing reasons for the decline of the one-party state in Africa was, as is well known, the change in the international climate. In late 1989 two events with enormous significance for Africa occurred within a few days of each other. One of these was the opening of the Berlin Wall, leading to a collapse of the one-party states of Eastern Europe. Particularly important for Africa in this process was the massive international publicity given to the fate of the most prominent Eastern European opponent of democracy, Nicolae Ceausescu. Both African heads of state and their publics followed these events closely, and did not fail to see the parallels with their own situations.

A second key event which occurred at almost the same time was the publication of the World Bank's report *From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, in which the Bank for the first time linked aid flows to the question of what it termed 'governance', which it defined as 'the exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs'.<sup>7</sup> Although the World Bank, and most of the donor governments which adopted the Bank's approach with alacrity, were careful to avoid connecting good governance explicitly with multi-party systems, it was a clear implication of their argument, as they referred to the desirability of freedom of speech, transparency of decision-making, and open political debate. Most African heads of state, who had become highly sensitive to the whims and sensitivities of the Western donor countries which had been on the winning side in the Cold War, and which were the source of much of their foreign exchange in one way or another, were quick to seize upon the implications of the arguments which they began to hear about the connection between politics and economic recovery.

It is thus accurate to refer to the role of external actors as one of the immediate causes of the current wave of democratization in Africa. But the deeper and more important causes undoubtedly lie in Africa's own experience over the past few decades. Pressure for a new form of political accountability had been increasing over the years, long before 1989, as one-party regimes showed themselves unable to give a satisfactory account of themselves to their constituents. This was not always apparent to outside observers because one of the main elements shoring up the one-party regimes by the 1980s was superpower support; in the context of the Cold War, Western governments reasoned that a one-party state which was stable, and controlled by a strong individual who could be dealt with on a personal basis, was preferable to the uncertainties of multi-party competition. Behind this impression of stability, Africans were pressing for new forms of political accountability. As Chabal points out, this was one of the reasons for the development of the prebendal systems of Africa in the first place, as in the first years after independence Africa's governing elites sought to satisfy their constituents through patronage and clientelism.<sup>8</sup> These systems, which worked after a fashion, proved more difficult to operate as economic conditions worsened after the oil-price rises of the 1970s. One may therefore see today's democratization as the latest in a series of attempts made by Africans since independence to find a form of political accountability which would serve the needs of African states. The model most widely followed in the 1970s and 1980s, that of patronage politics, had become increasingly difficult to operate as a result of the economic misfortunes which followed the oil-price shocks of the 1970s.

Once the Cold War had ended, and donor countries had begun to demand 'good governance' – a process in which 1989 will be a key date in history-books of the

future – time had run out for the one-party state. Some of the more far-sighted African leaders had already sensed the pressure for change long before it was made explicit by the World Bank. That leading apostle of the one-party state, Julius Nyerere, the former President of Tanzania, had actually begun to experiment with reform measures after 1985, when he renounced the leadership of the state to concentrate on reforming a party which had become arthritic. Partly in consequence of having made an early start, his CCM party has been able to dictate the pace of political reform in Tanzania with little pressure from outside. Another great apostle of the single-party state but of very different character, President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaïre, showed no signs of doubting his belief in the single-party system until after the political earthquakes of 1989. Thereafter, his political antennae, highly sensitive to international events, detected warning signals. In April 1990, before President Mitterrand's speech at La Baule in June 1990 had signalled a new mood in the francophone world, Mobutu announced the end of Zaïre's single-party system and the inauguration of an arrangement in which three made-to-measure parties would compete for power. Every Zaïrean recognized that Mobutu proposed to control all three parties. In the face of popular pressure for greater change, he was obliged to scrap this scheme. The wily Mobutu, having initially tried to limit the number of new parties in the interests of control, promptly went to the other extreme and encouraged the creation of as many parties as possible in order to create a system known to the ever-inventive public of Kinshasa as 'multi-Mobutisme'.

### Responses to Change

By and large, the responses of African governments to the irresistible forces of change may be categorized fairly simply. By the late 1980s a handful of countries, such as Senegal and Botswana, already had systems in which the ruling party contrived invariably to win elections, multi-party competition notwithstanding. After 1989 such governments could feel still more secure in their legitimacy and under no pressure to change the system of political representation. Elsewhere, some heads of ruling parties to which there was no legal opposition conceded to demands for multi-party rule by attempting, generally unsuccessfully, to create parties by administrative means. As we have seen, President Mobutu's attempt to do this in Zaïre failed. In the majority of countries, heads of state realized that they could not hope simply to create new parties by decree and that they were obliged to permit the exercise of more or less free political activity. At the same time, incumbent heads of state have used their power in an attempt to control this process, generally with considerable success. One technique widely employed has indeed been that of encouraging the formation of as many parties as possible in an attempt to divide and rule. Zaïre is now said to have over 250 political parties, and some other countries boast dozens. Another stratagem used by nervous governments has been the framing of a law forbidding the formation of ethnic parties, on the grounds that they would constitute a danger to public order, or imposing other conditions to prevent the easy formation of opposition parties. Such techniques have been used effectively in Tanzania, Nigeria, Chad and elsewhere to ensure that opposition parties remain small and subject to administrative restriction.

Only a small number of governments explicitly refused to change at all in the face

of international and national demands for democracy. One of the most prominent in the French-speaking camp, President Habré of Chad, paid the price when French troops refused to defend him against his domestic enemies. More successful were Presidents Moi of Kenya and Banda of Malawi. After stubborn attempts to resist all change, both have finally been obliged to move in the direction of multi-party elections, leaving only Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda and Nigeria as countries which can be said to have made little or no effective moves in the direction of democratic government. Uganda is a peculiar case, in the sense that political parties have existed for over thirty years and are even represented in the government, though their activity is restricted. It can also be claimed to be a special case by reason of its particularly difficult heritage. Nigeria too, it can be argued, is a special case in the sense that its heavily qualified attempts to instal a multi-party system must be seen in the context of a long period of alternation between civil and military rule.

The signs are that the many heads of state who felt so challenged in the period 1989–92, and who were essentially on the defensive in those years, may now feel that the tide has changed in their favour. By my estimation five heads of state – Kérékou of Benin, Kaunda of Zambia, Sassou-Nguesso of Congo, Pereira of Cape Verde and Da Costa of São Tomé – have conceded power more or less gracefully as a result of defeat in democratic elections. Moussa Traoré of Mali brought humiliation (and, later, conviction in a court of law) upon himself by his mistaken belief that he could sit tight and resist. His violent overthrow sent shock-waves throughout the ante-rooms of power but in the end proved to be an isolated case. Elsewhere, heads of state have shown themselves able to navigate the turbulence of multi-partyism and even to turn it to advantage. Presidents Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, Bongo of Gabon and others can now feel themselves under less pressure than before, secure as heads of state in multi-party systems after elections which were widely viewed as imperfect but which were grudgingly accepted by the international community. President Moi is trying to follow the same route, having been re-elected in a multi-party election which international observers considered to have been marred but which nevertheless – so Commonwealth observers maintained – represented the will of the Kenyan people. President Moi is now able to argue that he has followed the route set for him by the donor community and that the donors should therefore reciprocate by recommencing payment of the aid money which they had earlier withheld from Kenya.

### Consolidation, Challenge, Collapse

For a number of reasons, the flawed Kenyan presidential and legislative elections of December 1992 probably represent a landmark in the process of democratization throughout Africa. In the first place, Kenya is one of the most important African countries, and therefore events there have a wide impact on attitudes in both the donor community and other African countries. This effect has been magnified by the fact that President Moi had very publicly defied the donor countries, and was the subject of outspoken and remarkably undiplomatic attacks by the US Ambassador to Kenya, Smith Hempstone, a political appointee of President George Bush. Once the donor community had suspended aid to Kenya, Moi was obliged to stage a multi-party

election, but was able to win it with a minority of the votes cast. No doubt this was in part due to fraudulent practices by the ruling KANU party, but it may also be attributed to Moi's skill in dividing the opposition, aided by the short-sightedness of opposition leaders. Having been re-elected as president in a multi-party election, Moi now appears determined to humiliate both the opposition and the donor community, by behaving much as he did in previous times, banning opposition newspapers, harassing opponents and demonstrating his contempt for the parliamentary opposition. Although singularly lacking in diplomatic skills, Moi has demonstrated that a determined head of state with an intimate knowledge of the workings of politics in his own country can use multi-party elections to re-legitimize himself in international terms.

A key asset of heads of state who, like President Moi, are fighting a defensive action against popular and international demands for free elections has been control of the national army and security services. In the cases of Togo and Zaïre this has clearly been the crucial factor permitting Presidents Eyadéma and Mobutu to remain in power, although at the price of losing their international legitimacy. A more considered use of armed force has been in South Africa, where the ruling National Party appears to be succeeding in using its control of overwhelming force to improve its political bargaining position: a bloody process, and also a dangerous one, since it could equally easily lead either to a collapse of political negotiations or to a concentration of politicians' minds on the difficult task at hand. We must hope that the latter reaction prevails. President de Klerk has been far more astute than Eyadéma and Mobutu in dissociating himself from the violence exercised by some in his armed forces, while at the same time using that violence to attain specific political goals.

If President Moi has frustrated many Kenyan democrats by beating them at their own game, and President de Klerk may be said to be doing the same in more subtle and, perhaps, sustainable fashion, there are also examples of heads of state who refused to make any compromises at all and whose entire countries have paid a terrible price. In the case of Liberia, there is a case to be made that the country's tragic collapse into civil war may be dated to the United States' acceptance of the blatantly rigged presidential and legislative elections of 1985. This acceptance encouraged President Doe to believe that he could remain in power indefinitely and retain his international legitimacy in defiance of public opinion in Liberia. In the case of Somalia, the process was still more stark. President Siad Barre, having refused any form of political solution or political compromise, could not prevent his eviction from power by military means. This fall led to the complete collapse of the Somali state. There remains a risk of Zaïre following the same path, although it could be that Zaïreans have become so used to enduring a government which appears permanently on the brink of collapse that the eventual departure of Mobutu will in fact cause less hardship than in Somalia or Liberia. We must hope so. In the more complex cases of Angola and Mozambique, renewed civil war also looms. In Mozambique much patient negotiation now seems to be in jeopardy as a result of the tardiness and penury of the United Nations. In the case of Angola, the international community has also failed to play the role demanded of it, and the US Government is revealed to have utterly misjudged one of its more important Cold War allies. In Angola any hope of peace, not to mention democracy, now seems to be moving tragically out of reach.

What of those countries where some form of democratic transition may be said to

have taken place, and which provide more grounds for optimism than the horrors of Somalia and Liberia? In Mali, where hundreds lost their lives fighting against tyranny in a manner no different from the crowds in Bucharest, the international community – and France in particular – has failed to produce even a gesture of support. At least in the first year after Moussa Traoré's overthrow, Mali received no extra financial aid from France to help its reconstruction, and French ministers conspicuously avoided any symbolic gesture of solidarity. It appeared as though the French Government, which continues to have very close relations with most of its former African colonies, had been in favour of some measure of reform but not of the overthrow of a tyranny, an example which could have worrying implications for French interests if it were allowed to spread. In fact, since President Mitterrand's measured statement in favour of democratization to the assembled francophone African heads of state at La Baule in June 1990, France's Africa policy generally appears to have lost all coherence. The question of the value of the CFA franc remains unresolved, while French Africa policy remains more than ever in the hands of lobbies and special interest groups in Paris.<sup>9</sup> This pattern is strikingly similar, in fact, to the colonial lobby in nineteenth-century Paris.<sup>10</sup> No doubt it has much to do with the decline in the fortunes and health of President Mitterrand, who began his ministerial career in the 1950s as the minister for colonies and is an old Africa hand if ever there was one.

### *The World Bank and the Absence of Political Choice*

Benin, more encouragingly, appears to have passed its transition smoothly and to be enjoying a degree of economic progress, attributable in the main to its economic relationship with its giant Nigerian neighbour. The new government in Cotonou seems to have been successful in picking up the threads in the country's former multi-party fabric from the days when it was still called Dahomey. President Soglo, a former World Bank official himself, has committed himself to an orthodox World Bank economic reform programme. And this is one of the most striking observations to be made about political parties, new or old, all over the continent: virtually all of them, explicitly or implicitly, are committed to World Bank policies. They simply have no other choice if they are to aspire to power, since donor governments all take their lead from the World Bank, which is itself closely associated with US policy decisions.

The fact that African politicians are unable to articulate any original or critical view on economic policy, if they are to be taken seriously by local and international power-brokers, contributes to a sense that there is little to choose between rival parties, other than the moral characters and competence of the people who lead them. It follows that political parties tend to compete for the same social constituencies as their rivals and find it hard to identify and represent any social or economic interest group which has been previously under-represented, unless, of course, such a group is ethnically defined. Hence the tendency for rival parties to recruit ethnic constituencies, just as the barons of the old ruling parties tended to do. One of the few obvious exceptions to this generalization is South Africa, where rival parties clearly do represent differentiated social and economic interest groups and different ideological aspirations, in spite of the pressures from some quarters towards ethnic representation.

The relative failure of new parties to find new types of constituency is well illustrated by the contrasting cases of Kenya and Zambia. A comparison between them is particularly instructive because the government of the former has been regarded as Africa's most vociferous opponent of a multi-party system, while the latter succeeded in smoothly voting an incumbent out of office. The different course of events camouflages some interesting common features. In both Kenya and Zambia, opposition parties contesting for power had virtually no programme or manifesto beyond the ousting of the incumbent head of state. In Kenya, moreover, so great was the lust for power on the part of opposition leaders, uncomplicated by any articulation of alternative views of the national interest, that they were unable even to form an anti-Moi or anti-KANU alliance, thus allowing President Moi to win the election on a minority share of the vote. Had the Zambian opposition similarly been unable to unite, Kenneth Kaunda would still be president today.

In many other countries, too, the new opposition parties have displayed characteristics similar to those in Kenya. That is, they have often been led by experienced politicians, former ministers in the incumbent one-party regimes who for one reason or another have turned to the opposition. In the case of Kenya, there is no doubt that Moi virtually created the opposition by the single-mindedness with which he set about expelling his enemies from the ruling KANU party, which had traditionally been something of a broad church. Of course, all over Africa there was previously little scope for a person to build a political career or acquire experience of government other than as a member of a ruling party. No doubt many opposition leaders believe passionately that their countries need a new team in power. But even if we take a charitable view of their aims, the conversion of so many former ministers into born-again democrats can look suspiciously like opportunism.

The consequences of having an opposition posited with no programme beyond unseating the incumbent may be clearly seen in Zambia. The new Zambian President, Frederick Chiluba, is exceptional in being someone who made his political career outside the ruling party, as a trade unionist. Now, however, he gives every impression of being the prisoner of the experienced political heavyweights who financed and organized his election. The very name of his party, the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD), suggests a pressure group rather than a real political party able to articulate the political demands of specific sections of society. Unlike its predecessor, the MMD has little grassroots structure and few institutional means of rallying support other than the organs of government which it controls. Its lack of grassroots make its grip on power precarious, which may explain recent allegations that President Chiluba has been the victim of a coup plot. Similar observations could be made of many other movements which have arisen in opposition to incumbent regimes. They find it hard to locate a new political base other than in the machinery of government itself or by taking over the networks, and the techniques, of the ruling parties they seek to replace.

### Religion as a Political Factor

It should be noted, however, that religion can form the base for new forms of political recruitment. Hence perhaps the marked growth of politicized Islamic movements in

Sudan and Somalia, and the growing importance of religious affiliation in Tanzania. Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, Christian churches organized on a national level, having so often pronounced themselves in favour of reform and often being the only institutions able to rival the state in the importance and coherence of their infrastructure, have played a crucial role in challenging or overthrowing one-party rule. South Africa, Namibia, Zaïre, Mozambique, Angola, Kenya, Togo, Benin, Zambia, Madagascar and many others bear witness to their importance. The churches, which had such a crucial impact on Africa during the evangelization of the nineteenth century and, in some cases, in the run-up to independence, are now regaining their political influence. It may well be that in the years to come we shall see organized religion playing a more important role in African politics generally, reflecting not only the economic power and international connections of the Church and of Islam, but also the failures of the secular political parties. Spiritual or supernatural forces have always played a role in African politics, although modern political parties constructed on a Western, secular model found it difficult to articulate or control such forces. Political organizations may now find means of explicitly harnessing for political purposes the widespread belief that supernatural forces are important in the lives of human beings.

### Democracy and Governance

Some African countries, then, including Namibia, Senegal, Cape Verde, São Tomé, Botswana, Benin, The Gambia, Zambia and Mali, may be said to represent some sort of functioning democracy, no matter how precarious or imperfect. In each of these countries there are multi-party constitutions and elections which, although no doubt flawed, are much more than public-relations exercises. Nevertheless, in each of these cases a stern critic might argue that the constitutional form of democracy is used to hide a system so constructed that the ruling party can be confident of being re-elected indefinitely, or that a small political class competes for power while the mass of citizens see little relevance in the manoeuvrings of the elite. This line of criticism is rather more applicable in such cases as Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon and Zimbabwe. It is revealing, for example, that in Senegal, on the face of it one of Africa's oldest democracies, separatists in Casamance express themselves with bullets rather than ballots. In Zambia, recent allegations about coup plots suggest that not everyone has accepted the rules of the democratic game, as at first appeared to be the case. Nevertheless, a more indulgent commentator may take a less purist view and say that in these and many other cases, while democracy has not yet arrived, a process of democratization has begun which, with the passage of time, could result in greater freedom, stability, and improved governance. This, for example, was the view expressed by the departing US Ambassador Smith Hempstone, when he was interviewed by the BBC World Service on leaving Kenya. One may also argue that it is wrong-headed to expect Africans to behave exactly like the ideal models of Western Europeans or North Americans. In the first place, Western political practice does not actually live up to the ideals which its theorists profess. More importantly, Africans have their own political culture, including their own ideas about political representation, which makes the political elites accountable to the masses in ways not immediately apparent to outside observers.<sup>11</sup>

In a handful of cases, nothing at all resembling political democratization has happened: government has collapsed entirely, and power is in the hands of warlords who rule by force alone, without serious reference to any principles of accountability or legitimacy. This seems to be the case in Liberia and Somalia. It is perilously close to being so in Chad, Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and elsewhere, where governments either rule by the naked use of force or where considerable areas of the country are controlled by warlords. This is not only appalling for the people who have to live under the threat of such violence, but also dangerous for neighbouring countries which cannot insulate themselves from the depredations of the warlords just across their borders and which are threatened with destabilization. For countries which have fallen into the category of anarchy or control by warlords, the future seems bleak indeed in the absence of any external intervention aimed at restoring some form of legitimate government. Somalia, in this respect, is a test case.

In other countries with enormous problems, notably South Africa and Ethiopia, there are in progress interesting and potentially important experiments with new constitutions. If these experiments succeed, South Africa and Ethiopia have the potential to become models of how governments that have traditionally been highly centralized, and where political winners take all, may be adapted to distribute power equitably among multi-ethnic constituencies, perhaps through some form of federal or regional government.

In those countries where some degree of democratization, no matter how slight, has taken place, we may ask to what extent it may lead to the improved governance and economic productivity which the World Bank explicitly states as its aim and which many Africans doubtless desire. There is no doubt that the wave of democratization has had a notable effect on freedom of speech. In countries where criticism of the head of state or ruling party was quite out of the question until very recently – Togo, for example, or Malawi – people are now able publicly to testify to their own experiences of prison, or of torture or misgovernment. In Togo in mid-1991, when a national conference was in session, there was no doubt as to the deep therapeutic effect it had, not only on the persons testifying but also on their listeners. These testimonies, as well as criticisms of the government and other political reflections, were reproduced in print and electronic media quite freely before a spellbound national audience. It would appear that, even in a case like Kenya, where an incumbent head of state contrives to have himself re-elected under a multi-party system by dubious means, the government must reconcile itself to living in changed circumstances – a development supporting the view that even an imperfect election is better than no election at all.

In most African countries there is now more freedom of speech than there was, although Amnesty International has noted that the number of physical attacks on and murders of journalists has also sharply increased, meaning that the freedom of the press is not widely accepted. Moreover, press freedom does not necessarily imply a great widening of political access. In Africa, even the most professionally produced newspapers rarely circulate outside the major cities, because of both poor distribution and prohibitive cost. And revenue from sales and advertisements is hardly enough to sustain a genuinely independent paper. The signs are that those papers which survive will have to do so largely by becoming the mouthpiece of a specific politician or political faction able to provide financial help. This may be an improvement, but it is

something short of a genuinely independent press.

In regard to governance, understood to imply the ability of the state to formulate and carry out effective policies, it is hard as yet to discern any improvement. Free debate is no doubt one component of good governance, as the World Bank argues, but so too are financial resources and the competence and honesty of the government bureaucracy. To date, there are no signs that democratization has recast political constituencies in a new mode. They continue to be formed in terms of clientelism, although the forms of clientelist recruitment can change, whether based, for example, on party allegiance, ethnicity or some other factor. In any event, when combined with corruption, clientelist networks contrive to hamper the effective design and implementation of state policy.

It is quite widely agreed that the changes which have taken place in Africa since 1989 are the most momentous since the era of independence 30 or so years ago – the independence which in many respects, it is now apparent, took place in inauspicious circumstances. As always with changes of the magnitude now taking place, some of the deeper and more important changes may not be obvious for some time. It is hardly appropriate to attempt to draw more than the most vague conclusions from the present rapid survey of a period of history which is still playing itself out over a large continent. The one thing we may say with confidence is that nothing will be the same again in Africa.

## Notes

1. For an evaluation of the literature on this argument, as on many other aspects of democratization, I am grateful to my colleagues Rob Buijtenhuijs and Elly Rijnierse for their paper 'Democratisering-processen in Afrika ten Zuidoost van de Sahara (1989-1992): Een literatuuroverzicht', commissioned by the Dutch Directorate-General for International Co-operation. An English version is currently being prepared for publication.
2. One of the most recent of many general histories of Africa is Roland Oliver, *The African Experience: Major Themes in African History from Earliest Times to the Present* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991).
3. Jean-François Bayart, *L'État en Afrique: la politique du ventre* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).
4. These and other examples of specific countries are not intended to be exhaustive but are used only for purposes of illustration. It is also to be noted that I have refrained, for the purposes of the present argument, from referring to Mauritius, a remarkable democracy which is a member of the Organization of African Unity.
5. Amnesty International, *Gabon: déni de justice au cours d'un procès* (Paris: Amnesty International, 1983).
6. Bayart, *L'État en Afrique*; Basil Davidson, *Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation State* (London: James Currey, 1992); Patrick Chabal, *Power in Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1992).
7. World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* (Washington, DC, 1989), p. 60.
8. Chabal, *Power in Africa*, pp. 136-49.
9. Stephen Smith and Antoine Glaser, *Ces Messieurs Afrique: le Paris-Village du continent noir* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1992).
10. L. Abrams and D. J. Miller, 'Who were the French Colonialists? A Re-assessment of the Parti Colonial 1890-1914', *Historical Journal*, 19, 3 (1976), pp. 685-726.
11. See Chabal, *Power in Africa*, pp. 200-32.