ENDOGINISATION, AFRICAN LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRACY

ND November[*] and Otsile Ntsoane [1]

Abstract

This paper will attempt to provide an argument in favour of the recognition of pre-conquest African structures and their related knowledge in the post-modern operatives of governance. The authors strongly sense that unless the endogenous structures participate in shaping the post-modern social and political organs, the very big failures of the Western democratic organograms will be experienced. The process of endoginisation and repositioning of African institutions is guided by the socio-cultural and political identities developed by both leaders and the led.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

The colonial advances and the subsequent peripheralisation of traditional African institutions of governance, reflected in many ways the colonial stereotypes about the founders of these institutions. Especially, when it became clear to them that it is difficult to westernise indigenous people while African institutions of power, such as traditional leadership, are still in the mainstream and still influence the people's practices. Therefore, the resultant gradual destruction of linkages and support to the role that these institutions played added in the erasure of knowledge about how they operated. Furthermore, in the quest for good governance in most African countries, especially in South Africa, there seems to be an institutionalised departure from Africanity as evident in Chapter 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

However, in seeking solutions to African problems, it should not be forgotten that in the Eurocentric context good governance is used in more ways to benefit the West than to get political systems right in Africa. Furthermore, this good governance helps Western publics and élites to feel good about themselves and their triumphant systems. What most developing countries do not realise is that

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[*]   M.A. graduate, University of the Free State.
[1]   Otsile Ntsoane is an intellectual mentor and a lecturer in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) at the University of the North West. He is also a Ph.D. candidate in the same field. Otsile Ntsoane participated in the national audit process on Indigenous Technologies and is also a member of the IKS South Africa.

these conditions have teeth and if a country does not show progress, its funding via soft-loan windows will be cut. No wonder, Sogge (2002:131) asserts that "aid (and institutions like IMF and World Bank) officials have used the concept to promote a wide range of activities in the fields of human rights, anti-poverty policy, deregulation and de-bureaucratization, multi-party democracy and civil society".

Accordingly, with this article the authors intend to raise the issues of good governance and the need for endogenisation. In order to realise this objective, they will question the deep logic and the practical viability of rapid democratisation through conditions imposed from outside and above. Within the Eurocentric context, it is quite startling that "people can be forced to be democratic (and even punished when not) and on the other side be expected to be free" (Sogge 2002:133). However, the areas that the authors intend covering in their arguments are thus: prints of African democracy; traditional rulers quo vota!; democracy as consolidation of western hegemony in South Africa; traditional leadership and the national democratic revolution; and changing the political structures for an African democratic identity.

Therefore, in order to place arguments in this article into perspective and also to establish their origins and development, it is crucial to commence with an analysis of the historical context of traditional governance institutions in a continental perspective.

2.   ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF OPERATION OF TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP

Historically, much of Africa has been the scene of a long series of migrations and invasions of foreigners from the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Indians, Turks, to the Western Europeans. According to Harris (1998:203) each group was attracted to the continent by self-interest manifested in economic, political and military forces and prestige and Africans to varying degrees accepted that presence. Forces such as these made the western presence ominous because it represented a greater potential power than any previous alien group, especially at a time when doctrines and practices of racial superiority were popularised as "scientific" truth by reputable Western scholars and statesmen.

However, the truth is that the practice of traditional leadership by indigenous peoples in the world in general and in Africa in particular, represents not only the oldest form of governance of a nation or society, but also a triumph of a people against marginalisation, stigmatisation and oppression. For history, according to Karenga (1984:42), is the substance and mirror of a people's humanity in others' as

well as their own eyes. Therefore, the indigenous peoples' reception, value and usefulness on the scale of existence in the world is clearly noticed in the manner in which the institutions they afford humanity are handled by others.

Over and above, the struggle of indigenous institutions of governance for recognition in the past and even today represents the indigenous African peoples' cry for recognition of their uniqueness and different contribution to human advancement. Credo Mutwa in Anon 1 (2001:1) emphasises that "all humans want recognition because the greatest expression of human freedom is being recognized for one's value and the greatest anchor for democracy is creativity".

Not only were indigenous peoples treated as alien in the countries of their origin by the colonialists, but also their institutions like traditional leadership that served as mechanisms to assert and sustain the unique indigenous ways among peoples of the world. Despite this deformatory and destructive measure by the colonial and apartheid regimes, especially in South Africa, the resilience of the indigenous forms of governance is denoted by their present existence. However, the authors are aware of the political reality that during the apartheid era, the traditional institution of chieftainship was manipulated by the regime to collaborate with it and subject its own people to oppressive ends. It is also no secret that many of the "homeland" leaders were chiefs. Despite this, traditional leadership still enjoys tremendous support from people of African descent which provides the reason why the South African government still keeps the negotiation avenue open for the resolution of the conflict surrounding the institutions' powers.

Accordingly, there is no need to rush and follow western values without improving our own (African) values to suit modernity. The western import of democracy has its own difficulties, termed "artificial technical quality" in which: "(p)olitical change is treated as a desiccated, pseudo-scientific process dominated by manuals, courses, 'log frames' specifying intended outputs, and outside consultants" (Sogge 2002:134).

As a result, the observation is that this pre-packaged democracy is not only misleading the general population in Africa, but it also cracks a log jaw joke about African leaders who gaze at the West for modelling governance. Chinweizu (in November and Wessels 2002:150) adds that this leads to "a flee from the African reality and traditions and knock at Western doors, …seeking a place, however cramped, barren and deadly, in the backyard of Western culture".

For Africans to be able to march forward equally dignified among a community of nations, Africa's past, somewhat battered out of shape, can still furnish some demo-

cratic values that can be adapted to the modern context and utilised for governance benefit of the continent.

3.   PRINTS OF AFRICAN DEMOCRACY

It is clear from the foregoing that a search for the essence of being African would be difficult to trace in the past, especially when one takes into cognisance the fact that during the colonial era Africa's past and present were deliberately destroyed and distorted so that the following African generations could lose their selves and easily fit into the prepared Eurocentric future context. This colonial agenda was motivated by the fact that a people who does not have a past from which to draw their strength, would be easily terminated in the future either by absorption into other groups or by being consumed by self-hatred. Therefore, if Africans are to succeed in defying the colonial agenda, they have to painstakingly search the remnants of their out-of-shape battered past for traces of their past achievements and identity. In support of this point, Coetzee (2000:338) points out that "a commu-nity's (political) identity should grow out of its social identity".

Further endorsing and assisting the search, Coetzee (2000:338) also argues that a community's political identity is expressed in its characteristic forms of institutional organisation and these characteristic forms of organisation reflect its cultural bias, and so provide distinctive avenues through which power (and particularly coercive power) is attained and exercised. Therefore, due to the fact that, according to Williams (1993:134) "Akan democracy existed in West Africa before the advent of the West", Africans do not have to doubt what their past may tell them. Further-more, it is known that absolute monarchy in Africa is fairly new and has evolved through serious battles against democracy. Accordingly, Williams (1987:162-3) highlights that democracy gained its highest development in Africa where people governed themselves (at times) without chiefs, and where self-government was a way of life, and "law and order" were taken for granted.

Conscious of the colonial legacy, in tracing the historiography of traditional Afri-can institutions one should not be limited by the colonial borders and the western legalities. The way ahead should be determined by how far we have come as a people - first uncolonised. In many parts of Africa the political structure constituted the family or clan council, which is the basic social unit of kinsmen or *Kgosi*. During the formative years of the state each clan had its own village. As new immigrants swelled, villages turned into towns and cities, and these became divided into clan sections or *Kgoro* (Huffman 2000:14). Each clan section sent its elders as a representative to the village council over which the village headman (*kgosi*) pre-sided. This *kgosi*, in turn, served as representative of his "people" on the provincial

council over which the paramount *Kgosi* (*kgosi-kgolo*) of the whole tribe presided. Elections were held for the Central State Council over which an elected King would preside. Intentionally and at times out of ignorance of the operatives of in-digenous governance systems, anthropologists misrepresented facts about how African traditional institutions faired.

In view of this, Eze (2001:2) and Huntington (1996:93-4) agree that the definition of democracy as perceived and understood from a Eurocentric vantage point is also problematic. Furthermore, according to Eze (cited in November and Wessels 2002:137) democracy as perceived by the West is understood and articulated in the multiparty language of the political tradition of the West. This is a democracy that the West also requires of African states as a precondition for economic and military aid, without considering that politicians in non-Western societies do not win elections by demonstrating how Western they are (November and Wessels 2002:137 and Huntington1983).

4.   TRADITIONAL RULERS' QUO VOTA!

As in many developing countries emerging from colonial domination and rule, South Africa's endeavours to consolidate democracy as well as reconstruction and development have to be directed at several interrelated challenges. Key among them are the restoration of the battered indigenous identity, culture and forms of governance and at the same time it has to contribute to the global efforts to make a better and safer world for all. One of the indispensable lessons that history has taught us is that not a single one of the said challenges can be resolved in isolation from others and other countries. More so, as history has also taught, most African countries are the homes of often similar pre-colonial and colonial political tradi-tions. They have a double heritage of political values and these values provide benchmarks for analysis and action, motivating ideas and ideals that systematically enlighten and orient individual and collective choices (Ki-Zerbo, *et al.*, 1999:471). Therefore, the "deconstruction" of the colonial science that these Western trends represented does not, however, coincide completely with the presuppositions of the critical African trends of African thinkers like KiZerbo and T Obenga, to name but two. This is because there are socio-historical determinants that impose limitations when dealing with African traditional institutions, especially with regard to *Bogosi* (chieftaincy).

In attempts of Africans to restore and reclaim their past, one of the most difficult challenges facing them nowadays is to talk with authority on anything to do with African culture. Fanon (1963) and Chinweizu (1975) wrote about this in their works. Therefore, indigenous people operating in a Eurocentric context are not ex-

pected to have any deep understanding of their own culture or even of themselves. Other people (from the West) have become authorities on all aspects of the African life. In view of this, the late Nigerian musician, Fela Anikulapa Kuti, warned people to be careful of this "colonial mentality". As a result, Karenga (1984:42) calls all Afrocentric Africans "to rescue, i.e., free both indigenous history and humanity from alien hands" so that whatever forward march results could be the brain-child of indigenous African peoples. All these represent efforts to deal with the challenges confronting nowadays Africa.

Realising the irreversible nature of some aspects of colonialism, Kamalu (1992) advocates tolerance and understanding as well as hope for the western trained African. He further posits that the fact that the worldview of an African thinker assimilates a part of the "western" philosophic and scientific heritage does not deny it its Africanness, provided that the thinker uses the African heritage as his or her starting point (Kamalu, 1992). This is what the authors support and assert in accepting that there is a need to endogenise knowledge production and utilisation in Africa.

However, what complicates the situation is that in developing African countries democracy is not promoted and entrenched for its sake by the West. It is utilised as an instrument that would ensure the safety and continuity of the western interest in the countries.

In order to further enhance the objective of this article, it is imperative to also observe in hindsight how the elections of western type democracies followed in most African countries, like in South Africa, are used to paralyse people and at the same time consolidate the western hold on these countries.

5.   DEMOCRACY AS CONSOLIDATION OF WESTERN HEGEMONY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In order to understand the current state of affairs one needs to explore what George Balander (cited in Sogge 2002) calls the "triple history" of African state formation. The observation of African state formations within the "triple history", i.e., in the pre-conquest, conquest and post-conquest eras, will assist us to comprehend both the emergence of the Westphalian states in Africa and many of the difficulties that continue to afflict African states until the present. The fact that South Africa accepted the legitimacy of established European rules and norms which govern the international relations is testified by Robert Jackson (in Sogge 2002). He argues that international society claims to have laid certain rules and norms as to how relations between states should be conducted. This is clearly observed in the New

Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the US foreign aid pack. Jackson (cited in Sogge 2002) also argues that decolonisation was made possible by the international society and that it is this selfsame international society that is responsible for the exported democracy from the West to Africa.

According to Zack-Williams *et al*. (2002:65), what is tough talk in the endoginisation processes in Africa, and elsewhere among indigenous people, is critical focus on the institution of the state, the state's formation and the efficacy of European style, Westphalian state and "nation statism". Moreover, this focus on endoginisation has led to a renewed attention to the role of civil society since Gramsci.

On the other hand, the conceptual framework of African thinking has been both a mirror and a consequence of the experience of European hegemony, that is, in Gramsci's terms, "the dominance of one social bloc over another, not simply by means of force or wealth, but by a social authority whose ultimate sanction and expression is a profound cultural supremacy" (Forgas and Nowell-Smith 1985:46). This is exactly what the West planted in African countries in an attempt to "civilize the savages". It is a system of doing things that are alienating, suffocating, dis-empowering and which is at times violent in achieving its end, or perhaps is it its means?

Furthermore, Mudimbe in **The invention of Africa**, talks sadly of the problems of endoginisation. In this book he emphasises the significance for university departments to question the meaning of political power and interrogate all power-knowledge systems. Surely the paradox will reveal that what is dealt with is ideology, wherein modern African thought seems somehow to be basically a product of the West. Therefore, the seemingly permanent question that Africa struggles to answer, is now a jigsaw-puzzle lost in the globalisation process. Subsequently, the question mark demands of US (united souls of Africa) to deal with a recourse to "indigenise" political institutions and practices. In attempting to denote her task in this matter, post–independence Mozambique provided some powers to traditional authorities as part of democratic decentralisation. This is some thing that is not new to Africa any way (Williams 1987:197).

Thus, an objective observation of pre-conquest indigenous African life and the liberation struggles of African peoples during the colonial era, as well as the indigenous peoples' continuing demands for a return to indigenous ways and recognition of their institutions, serve as confirmation that Africans want democracy. However, the question is "whose democracy do they want?" or "are they demanding western dictation of democracy?" According to Williams (1993:131) every nation that calls itself a democracy apparently determines the kind of

democracy it wishes to be. As evidence, "the South American democracies generally differ very radically from that of the United States, which differs from that of its northern neighbour, Canada" (Williams 1993:131). Therefore, deducing from the foregoing a logical understanding is that all western demands that African countries and governments (including traditional governments) have to prove on a Eurocentric scale that they are democracies before they could be recognised as democratic, are unfair. With this observation, the only logical understanding of the developments is the entrenchment and enhancement of western hegemony in South Africa.

Accordingly, the South African government after succumbing to western pressures to comply with alien democratic principles in the 1994 and 1999 democratic elections, and also noticing that it had blundered, finds itself promoting the African Renaissance and on the other hand continuing to peripheralise the indigenous African systems of governance. In order to cover up on this matter, one of the reasons put forward to justify the action is that traditional leaders are not relevant in a democracy. Disapproving of this, Biko (1987:18) points out that "this again is a tragic result of the old approach, where the… (Africans) were made to fit into a pattern largely and often wholly, determined by" (the west). Denoting a degree of scepticism on the current brand of political leadership, Abrahams (2000:133) points out that "the whole generation of African leadership which led the way to political independence was, to some degree or another, …damaged by its encounters with the Europeans". This is supported by Mudimbe (1992), when he says, "since most African leaders and thinkers have received a Western education, their thought is at crossroads of Western epistemological filiation and African ethnocentrism". Moreover, many concepts and categories underpinning this ethnocentrism are inventions of the West. Fanon (1963:180) emphasises this point when he shows the damage in the native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements and behaves like a foreigner.

Furthermore, NEPAD that is promoted as an endeavour to accelerate the democratisation of Africa, also proves to be a western informed tool to consolidate western hold on the continent. Instead of promoting indigenous institutions that would assist in Africanising the democratic processes in the continent, these institutions are peripheralised. For instance, NEPAD is silent about traditional leadership in its section dealing with "Democracy and Political Governance Initiative". What is clear is that "Africa undertakes to respect the global standards of democracy, the core components of which include political pluralism, allowing for the existence of several political parties and workers' unions, free and fair, open and democratic elections periodically organised to enable people to choose their leaders freely" (Anon 2, 2002:4-5). Little attention is paid to the social development component of

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knowledge that the elders from the traditional institutions possess. It is this indigenous knowledge that is supposed to be protected through appropriate legisla-tion. However, the paradox is that the custodians of this knowledge are the tradi-tional leaders and the healers, the indigenous practitioners whose voices are not heeded to. Moreover, the definition of culture in NEPAD seems to exclude the very holders of the culture itself (*kgosi ke thotobolo o olela matlakala*). Perhaps the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union will take the issues of traditional leadership and democracy up.

With the foregoing in mind and before it is too late, the question is, "How can traditional leadership be brought back to the mainstream of developing an Afrocentric solution to problems that plague the continent?" In a nutshell, this question seeks a role for the institution in the new dispensation.

6.   TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP AND THE NATIONAL DEMOCRA-TIC REVOLUTION

During the anti-apartheid strikes and boycotts as well as many other activities, tra-ditional leaders played a crucial role, even when the apartheid regime hit hard on them. For instance, Chief Albert Luthuli is one of the chiefs who denoted their commitment to the freedom of their people when he chose to lose his status as chief at Groutville in 1952 rather than cease his anti-apartheid activities within the African National Congress (Liebenberg and Spies 1994:382). Furthermore, because Chief Luthuli later became the president of the ANC, the outraged apartheid government reacted by banning him in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act early in 1953 (Liebenberg and Spies, 1994:382). Therefore, just like it was the case with the majority of South Africans, the ANC victory of the 1994 democratic elections represented the end of stigmatisation, marginalisation and oppression of traditional leadership by the government.

However, the post-1994 era denoted that the elections were just the end of the struggle against apartheid and the beginning of a new freedom struggle. In support of this observation but expressing it in a different way, Anon 3 (1998:3) indicates that "in as much as this electoral victory advanced the goals of the national demo-cratic revolution, it did not signal the completion of the tasks facing the national liberation movement". However, the attitudes and activities of the newly elected leaders reflected some form of complacency as though the liberation struggle was all about mimicking and fitting the boots of the ousted colonial and apartheid masters. Accentuating this observation, Christopher Clapham, cited in Huntington (1996), asserts that "(they) were strongly committed to maintaining the state created under colonial rule". No wonder, the decision-makers and most politicians, just like

during the past dispensation in South Africa, still stigmatise the traditional institution of governance and forget the contributions and sacrifices for this order that chiefs like Luthuli made. In view of this, the crucial question is: "Is there a role for indigenous institutions of governance in the post-1994 national democratic revolution in South Africa?"

What should be borne in mind in attempting to find an answer to the foregoing question is the fact that the national democratic struggle was in the past not (solely) about Westphalian democracy but (also) looked at the broad gains that would advance the people's Africanness. While at the same time recognising the changed context, the present political set-up would be doubly dangerous without an Afro-centric guidance that traditional leaders provided in the past and that they can still provide presently and into the future that would be African-centred. Though, at face value the West appears to have been strategically off-balanced by the majority victory of the 1994 elections, for the moment, at the political level these forces continue to possess significant power and they are actively endeavouring to return to the position of power. Furthermore, a conducive environment for colonial manipulation is created by the fact that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa recognises the institution of traditional leadership and yet falls short of providing for its specific roles (November and Wessels 2002:146). Therefore, in a sense, the freedom and independence of the indigenous African institution as well as that of its African following are encumbered by and through the very things that are supposed to be utilised to overcome the colonial legacy.

Thus, the role of traditional leaders in the national democratic revolution within a westernised government and civil society that has been "detribalised" is no easy one and can also not be overlooked. Furthermore, in this modern world where most of the solutions from the West to humanity's problems seem to fail, the indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms that used to be embedded in the traditional institutions of governance, appear to be missed. This therefore accentuates the fact that the post apartheid national democratic revolution cannot only be the duty of the westernised leaders of Africa, especially when it is so difficult to draw a distinction between what Chinweizu (1975:161) calls "Middle-class solution", promoted by the West to retain and promote their hegemony in the new world order. In short, the western hegemony of the idea of state has had a profound effect on the development of identity and political community in Africa.

In view of the above, one can conclude that the solution to the continuing problems lies in a different political structure with an Afrocentric make-up.

7.   CHANGING THE POLITICAL STRUCTURES FOR AN AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC IDENTITY

Senghor (1965) articulates that the political and social identities are culture based. One does not necessarily represent the other; communities might have a common social identity but hold different political identities. Therefore, the "triple historic" formation sets well for a problematique in changing the political structures in Africa for an African democratic identity.

Accordingly, Africa's supreme political struggle in the post-colonial era can be reduced to two paramount longings - a striving to a greater coherence to African nationhood, and a striving to lend greater stability to African statehood (Elaigwu and Mazrui 1999:435). Thus, the crisis of nationhood is a crisis of flawed collective identity and the crisis of statehood is a crisis of unstable authority. What should not be lost from sight is that "most (democratic) African countries are colonially-created states presently struggling to become more coherent nations" (**ibid**).

Thus, in terms of planning for the African democracy, a central dilemma for policy-makers had been whether to maintain the authority of traditional leaders and rulers or to cultivate a cadre of western or semi-westernized intelligentsia. Following the western dictates and unaware of its entrappings, it is evident with the current developments in South Africa that the latter was chosen by the country in 1994. According to Ntsoane (2002:22) the western intension was "to produce assimilados' who would owe their existence to them (west) and thus be bound by that. In view of this, it is clear that the debate about traditional rulers is far from dead yet, especially in African countries … where indigenous monarchical traditions have refused to be completely extinguished" (Elaigwu and Mazrui 1999:436).

With the declaration of this millennium as the "African Millennium", an opportunity is presented which may lead "to an explosion of original and positive values mixing with the best of pre-colonial experience and exogenous contributions, building on deliberate choices" (Ki-Zerbo, *et al*., 1999:468). As African countries and leaders become aware of this, the issue will be the building of states and national communities; building economies able to satisfy the needs of the people and weaving a network of inter-African and international relations that will help to realise the global political options, while at the same time transforming the values that underlie biased international transactions.

Suggesting an alternative democracy, Sekou Toure (in Ki-Zerbo, *et al*., 1999:468) pointed out that "Africa is fundamentally communocratic. The collective life and social solidarity give it a basis of humanism which many peoples will envy. These

human qualities also mean that an individual cannot imagine organising his life outside that of his family, village or clan. … Intellectuals or artists, thinkers or researchers, their ability is valid only if it coincides with the life of the people, it is integrated into the activity, thinking and hopes of the populace."

Accordingly, the right for African traditional institutions to assist in transforming the colonial remains of autocracy and misplaced rationality and even reductionist ideas of "teaching Africans to govern" cannot be left to the same descendants of the former colonisers and conquerors of "*terra nullius*". Over and above, freedom and liberation from autocratic rule, as well as democracy and accountability, cannot be decreed. Hence the authors root their understanding of democracy in the kiaspora of the land of the great kings and queens of Africa. More so, that the western democracy is presently in danger of degenerating into dictatorship, if it is not yet there already. The present day Bush Administration (USA) provides a relevant example in this regard.

8.   CONCLUDING REMARK

The question whether or not African democracy is possible or exists could hardly have been initiated by the (Afrocentric) African people. To conclude, the big question is: "How can African democracy thrive in a new Africa in which moral autonomy of the traditional community has been negated? What is required in a centralisation of power that recognises and allows for a significant degree of auto-nomy in African multi-ethnic states?" Traditional authority should have developed according to its values, cultures, historical experience and aspirations. Unlike the present dispensation, African traditional leaders should not be seen as permanent outsiders to the state.

Any programme of social transformation which would succeed in addressing the question of how Africans can develop and maintain viable social orders within which individuals can exercise their rights, perform their obligations, and realise their genuine human potentials, has to contend with the problem of the entrenchment of clan consciousness in most African societies. Aware of the pro-blem of the ideological legitimation of the traditional socio-political order not being adequate for contemporary society, the authors hope that the foregoing arguments managed to advance pragmatic ideas and workable mechanisms to recognise and endogenise African societies.

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