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Understanding African Politics

Chris Allen

Generalisation about African politics and political systems is made difficult by the extent to which African states both differ from one another and have changed since independence. This article discusses whether it is nevertheless possible to understand African states as examples of the same political system, as some recent studies have asserted (or assumed). It argues that by comparing the historical patterns of political development in African states, one can identify a limited number of distinct historical paths, starting with the process of decolonisation (where there are two variants). Subsequently divergent paths arose from differing responses to early post-independence political crises, producing contrasting forms of politics – ‘centralised-bureaucratic politics’ and ‘spoils politics’ – and corresponding political systems. Further differentiation has arisen systematically from popular responses to the breakdown of these forms, giving rise to populist revolts, state collapse or to democratic challenges (and sometimes democratic restructuring). Each of these represents a distinct form of politics, and political systems, within Africa. A model of the process of political development in post-war Africa is set out along these lines, and used to criticise several recent attempts at characterisation of African politics, in which either states belonging to one historical path (and thus one political system) are treated as representative of all African states, or in which states from different paths and belonging to different systems are seen as examples of the same political form and political process.

How Many Africas? One, None or, Many?

Although many case studies of African politics are written as if their conclusions automatically apply to all or most African states (and some like Callaghy’s remarkable analysis (1985) of Zaire, are clearly intended to do so), there are still relatively few general works on African politics. Each of them, more or less explicitly, has had to confront the remarkable diversity of African politics. Thus Richard Hodder-Williams (1984, xv) notes that ‘the size and variety of the African continent, which makes any generalisation difficult, is perhaps too obvious a point to labour. But it is the necessary starting point ...’ He is echoed a decade later by Chazan and others (1992:14) – ‘there is not one but many Africas’ – and by Tordoff (1993:1): ‘Africa is a vast and diverse continent ... To lump these states together and talk about African politics is somewhat misleading...’

How then should we respond to the apparent wealth of differences that can be observed between individual African polities at the same time, and at different points in the history of one single state? Does the extent of these differences imply that each individual state should be studied on its own, and comparison be made only of features that individual states appear to share? Should we talk not of 'African politics' but only of 'politics in Africa'? Or is all this extraordinary and exciting variety itself largely the product of shared fundamental features – of common structures and common dynamics within African politics? The answer is politically as well as analytically important, as attitudes towards Africa of journalists, policy-makers, and those who make and execute decisions of international agencies frequently assume that all African states exemplify the same political system and same political history: to know one is to know them all. Equally frequently, this uniform vision of African states is one of political decay, incompetence, and disintegration, for which the remedy is external intervention and the substitution of the authority of international agencies for that of African governments. I shall argue that it is a mistake to look for just one African political system, and that there are several, necessarily limited in number.

As Osaghae argues in *ROAPE* 64, the history of the analysis of African politics is peculiarly full of blind alleys. One such blind alley, especially favoured within the English empiricist tradition, is to respond to the extent of variety within politics in Africa by limiting generalisation to 'common characteristics of the new African states' (Tordoff, 1993:3), these characteristics being identified by the frequency of their appearance: military coups, one-party states, corruption, ethnic politics etc. Thus the task of theorisation is simply abandoned in favour of a 'tidying-up' of the confusing welter of empirical data, drawn from different time periods and different histories. Unfortunately, this technique does not even identify the most significant categories of events, or features of political systems, that a systematic account would have to explain: it is far from clear, for example, that the single party state has any analytical interest as a distinct category. While it is important that our theories of African politics do explain why so many single-party states came into being, those explanations need not turn on features of the single party state form.

Another blind alley, with which this essay will be much concerned, is the attempt at a single characterisation of African politics: as 'personal rule' (Jackson & Rosberg, 1982; Sandbrook, 1985), as a variant of the early modern state (Callaghy, 1984), as the politics of the belly (Bayart, 1989) or of ethnicity (Ingham, 1990), or as the politics of chaos (Kaplan, and other Afropessimists). There is too much variation in politics in Africa, even when reduced to the simplest historical sketches of individual states, for a single political structure or process to be adequate for the analysis of those histories. What each of these authors does is to identify structures and processes common to many – but not all-African states, and then to write as if that exhausted all possibilities. Thus Senegal, Zaire, Cameroon or Somalia become exemplars of African politics and African political systems in general. These accounts can be persuasive precisely because such states are indeed exemplars – but not of all African states, only of significant and distinct subsets.

In their influential textbook on the politics and economics of Africa Chazan et al. (1994) also conclude that neither 'one Africa' or 'no Africa' is an appropriate response to the variety of politics in Africa. Their strategy is to identify a number of forms of political system that they see as occurring frequently in post-independence African history. These they discuss, with illustrations from individual states. They do not however, provide us with an explanation of why these forms and not others should be

common, whether they exhaust the possible forms, and how they are related to each other. A particular state may be used to illustrate different forms, again without a clear account of the progression from one form to another. Like Tordoff, what has been achieved is a 'tidying-up', although in the process not only different garments, but different parts of the same garment have been thrust into different drawers.

I shall try to overcome the weakness of Chazan's attempt to identify 'many Africas' by basing my categories on a comparison not of events within individual state histories, nor of the political forms that feature in them, but of the sequences of events and forms that make them up. I argue that there are a necessarily limited number of different sequences, which are linked together to form a small number of basic 'histories', all of which stem from one of two starting points, and into which (almost) all of the actual histories of individual states will fall. I further argue that recent events, such as state collapse or democratic restructuring, can best be understood as further stages within these basic histories. This approach has implications for the application of comparative politics to Africa, in that common types of event (e.g. the military coup) or state form (e.g. authoritarian presidentialist regimes) cannot be understood as analytically distinct entities, but only within the appropriate historical sequence. To this I shall return, in the conclusion. I shall also return, a little earlier, to the question of variety in politics in Africa, for while it is not necessary to give up hope of systematic generalisation in the face of extensive variety, neither must one sidestep explanation of this extent; why is politics in Africa so varied?

A Model of African Political Development

Decolonisation and Clientelist Politics

By the mid-1940s, the great bulk of African territories (excluding Egypt and South Africa) had experienced colonial rule – broadly similar for those under British or French rule – and the impact of the Depression and World War II. While the different territories varied greatly in level of urbanisation, the extent of labour migration, the size of the educated elite or of wage employment, etc, the basic constituents of their social structures were similar, as were the political histories that began in the 1940s with the development of mass nationalism, especially in areas with relatively large towns and an organised workforce. Within many of the nationalist movements there developed a division between a conservative wing drawn from African elites, and a radical wing, led by members of the elite, but taking its support more from trade unionists, ex-servicemen, students, women, labour migrants, and other subordinate groups. The conservative wing (such as the leadership of the United Gold Coast Convention in what became Ghana) was prepared to cooperate with the colonial authorities in return for a gradual and peaceful transfer of power, while the radicals (such as the supporters of Nkrumah within the UGCC (United Gold Coast Convention), later the Convention People's Party), were determined to see a far more rapid transfer, and were prepared to adopt a militant strategy employing strikes, demonstrations, riots, boycotts and agrarian conflicts – even, as in the case of the radical wing of the Kenya Africa Union (KAU) known as Mau Mau, armed struggle (albeit a struggle as much forced on them as chosen).

Britain, France (and less speedily Belgium) were initially committed to a prolonged gradualist strategy of decolonisation, based on notions of 'training in self-government' and of the creation of collaborative elites drawn as much from the educated and commercially successful as from chiefly families. Faced, however, with the activity of the radical nationalists in West Africa in the late 1940s (and later in most

of East-Central Africa), they responded by suppressing the radicals, though not always their leaders, and offering rapid decolonisation to the conservative wing. Decolonisation was now to occur in a matter of years not decades, and to be achieved through a series of elections with mass, but not at first universal, suffrage, allowing African governments to be formed with successively more extensive powers. The elections were introduced with little notice, sometimes only a few months, requiring nationalist organisations to mobilise huge new electorates in a very short time. Those that succeeded had combined two strategies for party building and creation of electoral support: a reliance on individuals who already had considerable local followings, and the use of clientelist ('patronage') politics to bind local notables to the party and local voters to the candidates. In essence, voters were offered collective material benefits (roads, schools, clinics, water etc) for their votes, while candidates and notables were offered individual benefits (cash, access to licenses, credit or land etc) as well as being portrayed as responsible for the arrival of the collective benefits. This combination produced a set of locally-based MPs and deputies, responsive to local demands, and loosely organised into parties whose leaders had access to private or public resources.

The loose coalitions (often, but not always, parties) that took power after the initial elections (in 1951 or soon after in the West, in the late 1950s or even later in the East, South and Centre) gained immense advantages from so doing. The ministries transferred into African hands at this point tended to be spending ministries, allowing ruling 'parties' to consolidate and extend their support, and recruit opposition MPs and areas, through the careful allocation of the ministries' funds. In Sierra Leone for example, the coalition formed by the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and chiefly representatives used their new control over rural credit to reward key rural supporters with loans that were never repaid (Kilson, 1966). Thus to have power was to have the means to reproduce it; to lose power, however, was to risk never having the means to regain it. This simple and readily appreciated fact was to have a profound effect on political behaviour and the political systems that emerged in or from the 1950s. Efficient though clientelism was in recruiting and maintaining support, it was also to prove highly destabilising.

Clientelist Crisis

Those who failed to gain power at national or local level tried to avoid permanent exclusion by exploiting communal divisions. Ruling parties and successful MPs did (and would) not attempt to recruit the support of all their constituents or every area of the country, and opposition groupings thus turned to the excluded or disfavoured candidates, families, ethnic groups, churches or Islamic organisations, areas etc. Long-standing local (and subsequently national) divisions became politicised, while party conflicts became redrawn and reconstructed as communal conflicts. Political conflict became increasingly violent as well, as ruling parties attempted to prolong their hold on power first by harassing the opposition and then – after independence for the most part – by election rigging, the use of police and local authorities, bannings and banishments, beatings, jailings and killings. In response and sometimes initially, opposition tactics became more violent, reflected in the explicit formation of groups of party thugs.

Within the new governments and ruling parties clientelism bred corruption, a phenomenon that predated 1950, but expanded with great rapidity thereafter. For those within the clientelist networks, loyalty to the party or its leaders was rewarded by access to valued resources. These could be passed on to more minor supporters

and to voters to reinforce their loyalty – or they could be retained, for personal enrichment. The temptation so to retain for one's own use, and to regard party and state office as existing to provide opportunities for retention (as 'prebends' (Joseph, 1985)), grew as ruling parties came to rely more on force than on support to stay in power. Politics, politicians and their associates, and their entire political system became increasingly corrupt.

Thus the introduction of clientelist politics in the early 1950s as a device for dealing effectively with the imposed decolonisation strategies of Britain, France and Belgium, led over the next decade and half to the phenomenon known at the time as 'political decay': the rapid growth of politicised communalism, political conflict and violence, abuse of political and human rights, and corruption. More importantly it created its own political crisis, a 'crisis of clientelism'. This arose from opposition and popular reaction to the trends outlined above, from increasing factionalism within ruling parties as groups sought to monopolise control over state resources, and to the regimes' neglect of the need to reproduce mass support as they diverted clientelist resources from voters to the pockets of party activists. Associated changes occurred in the military, especially the officer corps, as it was manipulated and used for partisan ends, and deprived of resources for corrupt ends (Luckham, 1971; Cox, 1976).

Crisis Resolved: Centralised-bureaucratic Politics

Usually this crisis of clientelism led to, but was not resolved by, military intervention. In many cases, however, there was no intervention (despite evidence of crisis), or it occurred but failed, as in Senegal with Dia's attempted use of military units to establish himself as the dominant force within the ruling party and state. In these cases the regime's response to evidence of crisis was to reform the political system, as in Senegal, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Zaire, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi, etc. The reforms were carried out piecemeal, and to differing extents, with differing emphases and timing, but in essence the packages were similar, aimed at producing stable, authoritarian systems to replace the unstable systems imposed by the former colonial powers. These experiments in stabilisation, in the creation of more appropriate political systems, involved four key (and overlapping) elements:

- The retention of clientelism (which was essential for party cohesion and mass consent), but combined with its control (hitherto absent).
- The centralisation of power in an executive presidency, the occupant of which would be able to stand above factional politics and to manipulate it, through control of constitutional, military and financial resources. One of many examples is provided by the reforms introduced in Zambia after 1970, the results of which are described (for the 1970s and early 1980s) very clearly in Gertz et al. (1984:102):

The dominant institution in the one-party state was not the party but the presidency, in which resided enormous power. The Zambian constitution provided that supreme executive power was vested in the President, and in its exercise he must act in his own judgement. He enjoyed wide powers of appointment, including both the Secretary-General and the Prime Minister, both of whom were responsible to him. As Chairman of ZIMCO (Zambia Industrial and Mining Corporation) he selected a large number of senior management and board members of the parastatal sector, over which he ultimately exercised control. Under the Preservation of Public Security Act, he enjoyed extensive powers to meet an emergency, including the right to detain without trial.

Kaunda also derived great power from his position as president of the party. While ultimately dependent on the party for nomination and election, his position as the only leader with a national constituency meant that he occupied an essential unifying role which gave him powerful leverage over the National Council. His position as Chairman of the Central Committee ensured him the dominant role in that body. As the appointment of Cabinet Ministers was his constitutional prerogative, so in practice the elected members of the Central Committee were essentially his choice ... The appointment of the District Governor, the key party office at district level, was also a presidential prerogative, assuring him of an important channel of communication with, if not always control over, the party hierarchy at district level.

- The displacement of the party and associated bodies as the main distributors of (and contestants for) clientelist resources, by a bureaucracy answerable to the presidency, usually, as in Kenya, a prefectorial system:

(In Kenya) the bureaucracy, and particularly the Provincial Administration, had played a crucial part in the centralisation of power that had enlarged the scope of the executive since Independence. One of the most marked developments in the period from 1963 had consequently been the gradual expansion in the authority of the Provincial Administration. This had begun when responsibility for the Administration was transferred to the Office of the President in December 1964. During 1965 many of the powers that the Administration had lost at independence were restored to it, so that by the end of the year Administrative Officers occupied a position very similar to that of their colonial predecessors. Their authority derived essentially from their position as the agent of the Executive and the personal representative of the President in the field. The Provincial Commissioner was restored to the position of head of the administration in his province and recognised as the overall coordinator of governmental activities at that level, responsible directly to the President.

By 1968 the scope of the Administration had been greatly enlarged by the progressive transfer to it of additional responsibilities. Its duties covered the key areas of the assessment and collection of graduated personal tax; chairmanship of the key Boards responsible for the selection of settlers for the settlement schemes; of the Land Control Boards which controlled land transfers; of the Provincial and District Agricultural Committees which had significant powers (especially at district level) on local agricultural matters; of the District Joint Trade Loans Board, which was responsible for advising the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on loans for small traders. They had also assumed a greater role in self-help organisations, having in many districts become chairmen of the coordinating committees set up ... to control self-help projects and distribute central government funds. As a result the Government had retained in their control much of the resources available at district level. ... It was therefore the Administrative Officer rather than the party official who became the major link between the Government and the people in the country at large (Gertz 1970:166-7).

In some cases, as in Tanzania, the party structure itself was transformed into a bureaucracy, and integrated with other bureaucracies such as the hierarchy of regional and district commissioners.

- The downgrading of representative institutions – political parties, elections, parliament, local government, trade unions, cooperatives etc. – within the political system. At best, they remained, with much reduced powers and under central control; at worst, they disappeared or had only a symbolic existence. These were, of course, the institutions most implicated in clientelism; and with

their decline there was an associated loss of power of regional and local party bosses, union leaders etc.

What made these reforms effective was that they provided a means for the regulation of clientelist competition. Hitherto, since each factional leader within the ruling party or coalition sought to obtain the maximum degree of control over resources (and thus secure and extend his faction's power), conflict over resource allocation tended to increase, and all manner of resources tended to be converted into clientelist rewards, notably appointments and investments. There existed no way of controlling this process, as all those who might have been responsible for control were competitors themselves. With the creation of a powerful presidency, itself controlling directly considerable resources and able to exercise indirect control over still more resources through prefectural systems, competition could be regulated, and resource allocation overall less determined by the outcomes of clientelist competition.

The 'centralised-bureaucratic' regimes that resulted from the reforms proved stable until the late 1980s, a stability that can be seen not only in the ability of leaders to stay in power and manage challenges that elsewhere led to regime collapse, but also in the smooth transfers of power that became possible, even in cases in which the outgoing President had resigned (e.g. Senegal) rather than died (Kenya). There are, however, two exceptions: Zaire, in which the reform process was abandoned by Mobutu after 1974 (when the political system became dominated by 'spoils politics', discussed below), and Guinea, where the reforms were abused and neglected in the dying years of Sekou Toure's rule, leading to a military coup after his death. While the bulk of centralised-bureaucratic regimes were created in the early stages of clientelist crisis, a few were established after a series of coups, as in Togo (by Eyadema) and Benin. The case of Benin is particularly significant here, as until 1972 it was regarded as the most unstable African state, with regime changes on average every 18 months. In 1972, yet another coup brought Mathieu Kerekou into power, and over the next two to three years he introduced a typical reform package. From 1974 to 1990 it remained stable, though increasingly challenged in the late 1980s, until it became one of the first regimes transformed by the recent wave of democratic struggles (Allen: 1989, 1992).

Crisis Unresolved: 'Spoils Politics'

Where clientelist crisis was not resolved by implementing centralising-bureaucratic structural reforms, there occurred political breakdown, normally military intervention. Where – as in the cases of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Somalia, Uganda, Ghana, Upper Volta and others – this persisted, we then encounter a different political dynamic and form of politics: spoils politics. As the product of continued unresolved clientelist crisis it results in an extreme version of the politics of clientelist crisis, going as far as the complete breakdown of the system. It is characterised by eight key features:

Winner takes all: The dominant political faction tends to deny access to resources to all other factions. This could be seen in Nigeria in 1979-83 in federal, state and local governments (Joseph, 1987). Four major parties competed to control these bodies, with the predominantly northern-based National Party of Nigeria winning at federal level, but the rest represented at state and local levels. In order to increase the number of protected arenas within which a particular party (or faction) could control resources, the number of states and of local units was continually increased. Factional conflict occurred within all parties at state level, leading to splits and to major realignments in 1982-83. In areas controlled by a given party, that party made

strenuous attempts to exclude other parties; and since the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) was the most powerful, it was the most active and repressive in its attempts, abusing federal powers in the process.

Corruption/looting of the economy: In Nigeria again, wholesale corruption – the use of office for private (i.e. personal or sectional) gain – was visible in the gross abuse of federal construction contracts for building the new capital in Abuja, and was encapsulated in comments like ‘our leaders fight only for their pockets’. In Sierra Leone after 1968 there occurred a rapid increase in the level of corruption, spreading throughout the administration, and headed by the President, Siaka Stevens, while in Ghana under President Limann (1979-81) all accounts stress the very public corruption of the parties, ministers and officials. Ghanaians invented the term *kalabule* to refer to an economy dominated by corruption and the black market (in Uganda, *magendo*).

Economic crises: Such crises arose only in part from external factors, such as the increase in oil prices or falls in agricultural export prices. In Ghana, cocoa revenues shrank as production fell, arising from neglect of cocoa trees but also from the impact of corruption and economic policy (e.g. lower prices to producers to create a greater surplus for political leadership). In the years from 1976 there was extreme inflation, at times over 100 per cent a year, and consequent sharp increases in urban and rural poverty, even for those with jobs. Even in Nigeria, where oil allowed a massive increase in revenue, the lack of productive investment in 1974-79 meant that when oil output and prices fell after 1979 there was inflation, large external borrowing, austerity budgets and mass sackings etc.

Lack of political mediation: Spoils politics is institutionless, in that the political system now possesses no effective means of preventing mass discontent, or of mediating between the state and discontented groups. These groups instead resort to force – strikes, withdrawal from production/sale of crops, riots etc. – even strikes by professional groups, like the Ghana Bar Association or the Professional Alliance in Sudan. The government meanwhile relies on bribes or force, increasingly the latter, as can be seen in the sequence of Nigerian regimes from 1983 onwards, and in Sudan in the same period.

Repression and violence: These come to characterise relationships between citizen and state, and all political activity. Thus the 1972 and 1977 Sierra Leone elections involved elimination of opposition candidates, intimidation, the blowing up of an opposition newspaper office, vote rigging etc. Nigeria in 1979-83 was marked by an increased level of violent conflict and central repression, the abuse of human rights, etc. In more extreme cases like Uganda we find a state ‘at war with its citizens’, and violence extending down to village-level conflict between political factions.

Communalism: This is used extensively as a basis for political mobilisation or support (e.g. 1979 Nigerian elections), or of factional activity. It is noticeable that analyses of Ghanaian politics point to the increasing salience of ethnic divisions in the 1970s, as do accounts of Sudanese politics under Numeiri.

Endemic instability: There is growing or persisting instability in particular regimes, shown either in continual attempts to overthrow government (e.g. Sudan, Sierra Leone), or in the total breakdown of civil order (Uganda, Chad), or – more commonly – in the rapid sequence of regimes.

Erosion of authority: This affects not simply a particular regime alone, but the state and political system in general, leading to wholesale popular alienation, and to 'withdrawal from the state', especially among rural inhabitants and women – or to 'populist revolt', discussed further below.

The Dynamics of Spoils Politics

I have argued that spoils politics results and is shown especially in the creation and collapse of a series of essentially similar regimes. It is therefore easy to see spoils as no more than repetition, as a cycle modified only by a tendency for its features to intensify. This would ignore several aspects of relevant state histories, notably that not all regimes collapse at regular intervals, that some do attempt political reform, even structural reform, and that some undergo dramatic, perhaps fundamental political change.

Regime survival is potentially embarrassing for my model, as it asserts that regimes marked by spoils politics are self-destructive. The government of Siaka Stevens in Sierra Leone survived from 1968 to 1986 and power was peacefully transferred by Stevens to the head of the army, Brigadier Momoh. It took almost as long for Numeiri to be overthrown in Sudan, while Mobutu still rules (after a manner of speaking) in Zaire. Both Sudan and Sierra Leone subsequently became unstable, violent, etc, being marked by intense civil war in both, and by the virtual collapse of the state in Sierra Leone, and Zaire has become ungovernable since 1989. Nonetheless, these instances of survival needs some explanation. Four factors may have allowed Stevens, Numeiri and Mobutu to survive repeated challenges for so long:

- *leadership skills*, notably in preventing opponents from combining, by selective cultivation, purges etc;
- *windfall gains* from oil or commodity price increases, which increase the amount available for distribution through what is left of clientelist networks, or more often for policy measures designed to placate key groups;
- *external support* mainly in the form of cash (aid, investment) or military backing, either indirect or – notably with the French – direct intervention; and
- *technical sophistication* in repression and the development of internal security.

More generally, one should not assume that because a regime belongs to an inherently unstable type, that it will automatically and swiftly collapse: we need also to examine the development, nature, organisation and strength of social and political forces seeking to overthrow it. Survival in these cases may rest mainly in features specific to each state, rather than in general features specified in the model.

Post-spoils Reconstruction: Populist Revolt

Several spoils-dominated states have shown periods of reformist activity directed at increasing stability. Three main varieties have occurred: *centralised-bureaucratic reforms* which worked, at least in the medium term (Dahomey/Benin, Togo); certain *related reforms* which did not, such as the Union Government strategy in Ghana in the mid-1970s (which attempted to create a legislature with sectional representation but without parties or national elections); and *populist revolt*. This last involved the overthrow of the regime by the junior military and/or groupings relying on (or being

forced to come to terms with) popular forces (the urban poor, organised labour, student radicals, even radicalised professional bodies – but only rarely peasants). This precluded, or at least made difficult, the continuation of spoils politics, as populist revolt is itself based on a different form of politics and expresses different political relationships and goals (notably the creation of democratic and accountable political systems). Such events occurred in Ghana (1979, 1981), Upper Volta (1984), Liberia and perhaps Gambia (1981), and under somewhat different circumstances in Uganda in 1986. Incipient populist revolt may also have been part of the background of the 1985 Sudan coup.

These revolts are well described by Donald Rothchild as ‘experiments with radical populism, searching for authentic African solutions to the problems of social incoherence and economic decline’ that resulted from spoils politics (Rothchild in Widner 1994:218). They were, however, more effective as a judgement on spoils politics than as a counter to it. While revolts resulted in the formation of a number of populist regimes, mixing junior officers, radical students, trade unionists and dissident elites, none of these have survived unchanged. Those in Ghana and Uganda were transformed into versions of centralised-bureaucratic states (in part under the pressure of structural adjustment), that in Liberia reverted rapidly to spoils politics, and that in Burkina Faso declined into factionalism and – finally – the assassination of its leader, Thomas Sankara.

The occurrence of populist revolt also indicates that a cyclical view of spoils politics ignores its impact on political consciousness, both civilian and military. In the military case, we find that military regimes engaged in spoils politics frequently alienate not only the rank and file (for the same reasons as the rest of the poor) but also junior officers. This arises from the latter’s perception of the regime and/or their senior officers as destroying the army’s integrity and status, grossly abusing their offices, failing to distribute spoils, etc. It can lead to attempts to create a reformist military regime (through what has sometimes been called a ‘rectification coup’), as in Benin (1972) and Upper Volta (1982). The junior officers may in turn realise the futility of removing corrupt officers without changing the system that underpins corruption, and go on to attempt to transform the system itself (Ghana 1981-2, Upper Volta 1984). When the latter happens, it will normally be because the civilian population is also alienated, not merely from the particular regime but also from the political system it represents. Analyses of Ghana in the late 1970s frequently pointed out precisely this phenomenon among urban and rural populations. Part of the reason is that spoils politics necessarily excludes not only mass participation but also increasingly large sections of the elite, and some of the elite – notably the professions – may come to share in popular judgements of the need for political transformation.

Some Problems with the Model

In addition to the occurrence of ‘stable’ spoils systems discussed above, problems arise in this model from its claims to generality, and from its reliance on factors internal to African political systems.

Not all states would seem to be eligible for inclusion, while others do not fit with any ease. Certain territories were decolonised through armed liberation struggle, and require separate treatment (see below). Others, like Liberia and Ethiopia, were not decolonised at all. These can be incorporated by looking for points at which their individual histories begin to correspond to the sequences in the model. In the case of Liberia, the period (after 1944) in which the True Whig regime began fully to involve

the rural hinterland within the party and the political system that it dominated may be treated as corresponding to the decolonisation/early post-independence period of the model, and thus to be understood as a period of clientelist politics. Thereafter Liberia developed into an easily recognisable instance of spoils politics. Ethiopia is more problematic, since until 1975 it had no substantial parallel in Africa (other monarchies existed, of course, but the group they constituted is not analytically coherent). Even after 1975, when it tended to be associated with other socialist or 'Afromarxist' states, the parallels are less those of political structure and more of external relations, policy, and policy failure.

Two southern African states are also troublesome. Swaziland, another monarchy, shows echoes of the patterns of political development further North, notably in periods when the royal house was politically weak (e.g. around independence and in the 1980s). The influence of South Africa, the political strength of the royal house and associated institutions such as Tibiyo, and the weakness of civil society, make it however difficult to argue for systematic similarities to other African states. Botswana, by contrast, appears to 'lack' the period of development of clientelist politics followed by clientelist crisis, and has the reputation of being the only major African state to have remained a multiparty democracy since independence. I would argue that this reputation is based on wishful thinking. Botswana is unusual, but primarily in having already established a version of a centralised-bureaucratic system at independence, for a set of reasons unique to it at the time. Since then the system has been extended and formalised, and is responsible for Botswana's stability, though the ruling Botswana Democratic Party's capacity to reproduce its monopoly of power without banning opposition parties makes some contribution. Like other centralised-bureaucratic states, Botswana has recently been experiencing pressures for democratisation, muted by its unusual economic strength in the 1980s, and the weakness of civil society.

The problem of the existence of apparent exceptions among African political systems may be seen as an aspect of the broader problem of the extent to which any general model of African politics should attempt to 'explain' variation, a matter to which I return below. A potentially more serious limitation of the model as set out is that it has an apparently closed dynamic. Not only does it make African politics distinct from the contemporary politics of the bulk of the third world, but it does not obviously allow a direct role for external political and economic forces (something which both modernisation and dependency approaches did do). In dealing with apparent exceptions to the basic pattern and dynamic of spoils politics, for example, I used external political intervention or external support (as in Zaire) as a factor that might explain the persistence of individual regimes despite spoils, rather than as a constituent of spoils politics itself.

Models are, however, inherently limited and simplified. They attempt to explain, or at least to link, a wide range of phenomena using the minimum number of concepts, variables and relationships, but cannot cope with every detail or the entire range of phenomena. They can be tested and assessed by establishing whether the process of explanation can be taken satisfactorily far enough before the model becomes inconsistent, tautologous, trivial or excessively reliant on *ad hoc* additional factors. I would argue that this model is economical, flexible, robust and capable of illuminating new examples and new periods of political development (such as that since 1989). It is confined to the nature and dynamics of African political systems, and notably to the historical sequencing of political systems. The model would thus form a critical element of a theory of African politics, without constituting that theory itself.

It is therefore essential that the model is not constructed in such a way as to be inconsistent with other major elements of such a theory, such as class, or external political and economic relationships.

External forces are important in all periods in the model. Thus, for example, there was a marked increase in external inflows of revenue to African governments in the years around independence, in the form of aid and the repayment of earlier transfers to metropolises. These helped to fund the high costs of expanding support through clientelism. The later crisis of clientelism arose at least in part from the decline in these flows, when combined with increased diversion of resources into private enrichment and away from (re)building support among the electorate. Considerably more direct and directive influence can be seen in the 1980s, to which I now turn.

African Political Development in the 1980s: Debt, Devastation, and Democratic Struggle

During the 1980s almost all African economies entered, though to differing degrees, a period of sharp economic decline, some like Ghana and Uganda having done so earlier. This decline was manifest in declines in output, export revenues and capital inflows, combined with massive and unserviceable debt burdens, the highest in relation to GNP in the third world. In an attempt to restore capital inflow, African governments have had to have recourse to the IMF, and to reaching agreement with it (and thus indirectly with all lenders) on conditions for debt management and future loans. These agreements, known as structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) amount to a rigid framework for economic policy, reducing the state's role in and means of control over the economy (for example, by setting exchange rates), severely reducing the social wage and provision of services to the poor, and stressing the primacy within policy of debt servicing (Bromley, 1995). Towards the end of the 1980s not only did it prove virtually impossible to obtain significant loans without such agreements (even from private lenders), but to the economic conditions were added a range of political conditions. Borrowers were left in no doubt that the development of formal democratic systems (notably the holding of competitive elections), and attempts to achieve accountability and the rule of law, administrative probity and good governance, would be regarded as essential for loan eligibility. The impact of economic decline, SAPs and conditionality on centralised-bureaucratic and on spoils systems was dramatically – and necessarily – different.

The Centralised-bureaucratic State Challenged: Democratic Renewal

Economic decline and the debt crisis undermined the capacity of centralised-bureaucratic systems simultaneously to fund elite consumption, public sector salaries, and clientelist distribution to local networks and to their citizens. With structural adjustment came restrictions on spending (both levels and patterns), and a stress on debt servicing combined with only modest levels of loans (Ghana, often cited as a 'successful' case of structural adjustment was unusually generously treated in this respect). The impact was complex, weakening the state's capacity to combine authoritarian management with clientelist distribution, and thus undermining the stability of the centralised-bureaucratic system. Five elements were especially significant: the state became less able/less willing to provide services and employment, and might even (as in Benin) become unable to pay wages and salaries; this forced citizens to become more reliant on non-state institutions and networks, leading to a growth in the informal economy and in civil society, while further

weakening the state; it also undermined the legitimacy of the regime, while at the same time a variety of exclusive state institutions (the single party, official trade unions etc) began to decay and become subject to internal division, weakening the state's authority and power; those holding power and their associates tended to respond by becoming more corrupt and more visibly so (as in Kenya, Zambia and Benin), and again legitimacy and authority are undermined; and, last, the growth of civil society, the declining legitimacy of the regime, and its incapacity to deliver services, salaries etc, gave rise to popular (mainly urban) demands for accountability, openness, political participation and the right of association etc, i.e. for democratisation (see here especially *ROAPE* 54, notably the editorial). These demands came especially from students, trade unionists and state employees, but were supported by those (former) members of the ruling party or its equivalent who had been demoted from past positions of power and influence, or who feared the disintegration of the regime.

The response of the regime to this growing challenge appeared to depend on three factors: the weakness of the economy (especially that part of it in the hands of the state); the residual strength of the regime and integrity of the centralised-bureaucratic system; and the willingness of lenders to exercise political conditionality. It remains difficult to fully to assess the role of this last factor, for while lenders gave public support to the need for democratic reform (as they saw it), they were far from uniform in their willingness to exert pressure to achieve it. Thus while weak and impoverished regimes were displaced in Benin and Zambia (and Malawi) with the support or connivance of lenders, others were able to resist democratic challenges without evoking lasting sanctions. In these cases, though by no means solely for that reason, we find limited or cosmetic reforms (Gabon, Ivory Coast), reversal of democratic gains (Togo), regime-managed reform (Tanzania), or the manipulation of processes leading to elections (Kenya). This pattern persists, as the most recent negotiations over loans to Kenya have shown; and rather than having experienced a 'wave of democratisation', as the events of 1989-91 were once portrayed, these states have begun a prolonged period of democratic struggles.

Terminal Spoils: State Collapse and Endemic Violence

Economies in states dominated by spoils politics, and thus by extreme levels of corruption, mismanagement and waste, have tended to show more rapid decline than others (unless shored up by oil revenues, Arab investment etc). The response of the regime to economic decline was to intensify spoils behaviour, making it less likely to be offered loans by bilateral or multilateral lenders, unless the states were seen – as for a while with Somalia and Zaire – as having geopolitical significance. There followed extensive defaulting on loan repayments and in some cases ineligibility for IMF loans. All this simply accelerated the process of disintegration of the state, without strengthening civil society, thus making a coherent populist response less feasible. The debt crisis and lender responses to it thus contributed to the series of state collapses in spoils systems that mark the early 1990s.

In the earlier discussion of spoils politics I characterised it as a system of endemic instability. In the period up to 1980 this was revealed at the level of the individual states in frequent major challenges to sitting governments, often from the military, and usually successful in causing the government to fall. The new government then faced the same situation, for nothing fundamental had been resolved by the fall of the old one. In a few cases in the 1970s this process moved further, to one of state rather than regime collapse, as in Chad, Ghana and Uganda. These three are not wholly

similar; for example the violence of the state towards its own people in Uganda, and the formation of regionally-based armed groups in Chad, were both absent in the case of Ghana. What is characteristic of these (and later) cases is that 'the state pulled into itself and imploded: became a black hole of power' (Zartman, 1995:7). The state ceased to perform (rather than was prevented from performing) its basic functions, and ceased to rule, especially in the peripheries (being replaced informally by neighbouring states, or by more localised authorities, or by none), while the regime put an end to not only its own legitimacy but the legitimacy of the entire political system.

It is this implosion of the state that made it so hard (among several other factors) for populist revolt to result in stable populist regimes. Since 1986 there have been no populist revolts (despite a hint of one in the offing in 1985 in Sudan); rather we have witnessed the great majority of spoils systems moving towards state collapse accompanied by warfare, often highly destructive of society and the economy. Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda have already collapsed, while Burundi, Sudan and Zaire show clear and advanced symptoms. Nigeria under Abacha remains characterised more by the earlier picture of spoils, but even in this case it is noticeable how furiously critical and pessimistic Nigerians have become towards the regime, and the extent to which academic and journalistic commentaries stress the intensification of spoils behaviour. Thus in a recent article in the *Guardian* (8 July 1995), which begins 'Nigeria is a state being looted to death. Nothing much functions there ...', the subsequently detained Beko Ransome-Kuti of the Campaign for Democracy is quoted as describing the regime as 'a rule far more brutal, far more cynical and far more vicious than anything we have experienced before'. And, the article continues, 'he fears anarchy, violence and a terminal revulsion against the whole idea of Nigeria' in response.

The more recent cases of state collapse have attracted more attention than did Chad or Ghana, or even Uganda. As with Uganda, it has been the scale of political violence, the subsequent massive social dislocation, economic collapse, and the assault on social institutions and values, that command attention. Yet there is again no uniformity in the form of violence, for while in Rwanda (and Burundi) it stemmed from deliberate planning by those in power (and, in Burundi, their opponents), in the other three cases violence stems from the activities of warlords. We need a clearer typology of political violence, especially in terminal spoils systems, which would allow us to go beyond distinguishing different forms to establishing the links between them and the broader political process, as does Mark Duffield (1991) in his discussion of resource shortages, local warfare, state-sponsored violence and civil war in the Horn.

Several collections of essays on political conflict and state collapse have been published recently. The most ambitious and stimulating is that edited by William Zartman under the title *Collapsed States* (Zartman, 1995), with eleven case studies and six general essays – but without any extended discussion of Rwanda or Sierra Leone. It attempts to theorise state collapse, seeing it as a 'long-term degenerative disease' rather than as a sudden calamity, and thus searching for characteristic predisposing factors, triggers, and – more originally – the means for reversing the process after collapse has ensued. Thus the three early instances of collapse are used as case studies in reconstruction, and other chapters examine the reconstructive potential of external intervention, centralised leadership ('strongmen'), and democratic renewal.

Unfortunately, the study identifies 'collapsed states' not by a political process but through a set of empirical criteria amounting to loss or lack of statehood (p. 5). Thus

along with Somalia and Liberia we are offered studies of Mozambique, Angola and Ethiopia, and of Algeria and South Africa, the latter two as instances of 'states in danger' of collapse. Mengistu's Ethiopia – like the Smith regime in Zimbabwe and the French colonial regime in Algeria – is a case of a state vanquished in war, and must be sharply distinguished from cases in which warfare is a symptom of state implosion. Similarly, to draw parallels between cases in which civil war has been substantially (if not wholly) engineered by regional and great power intervention (as with Angola and Mozambique), and those in which warfare is substantially (if not entirely) the product of internal forces and processes, is to vitiate any chance of theoretical advance. It also undermines any prospect of reaching valid conclusions on means of reconstruction. Thus Marina Ottaway's essay on 'democratisation in collapsed states' largely avoids discussion of spoils-based collapse (except for Sudan), does not come to terms with populist revolt, and instead concentrates on the destabilising potential of democratic struggle and the growth of civil society.

Guerilla War and Socialist States

A small group of states achieved decolonisation not through demonstrations and negotiations, but through prolonged warfare, predominantly guerilla warfare. Of these, three became single-party states ruled by parties which rapidly declared themselves to be marxist-leninist: Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. Two others, the last two of such territories to be decolonised, combined initial armed struggle with negotiation and an electorally-mediated transfer of power under international supervision; Zimbabwe and Namibia. Algeria, finally, the first to achieve independence, created a single-party but non-marxist state, suffered a military coup, and then developed into a version of centralised-bureaucratic politics.

Of this group only the first three can be claimed to represent a distinct historical path (among African states). Zimbabwe and Namibia, although influenced by their history of armed struggle, appear to be following similar paths to those of the peacefully decolonised majority. The three former Portuguese colonies underwent a form of decolonisation that did not rely on the mobilisation of clientelism, and did not therefore lead to its concomitant features. There is indeed some evidence that the party leaderships actively sought to counter such developments at local level in the early stages of the struggle, though the evidence is weaker for Angola, and its significance was overestimated in contemporary commentaries. For a variety of reasons – the leaders' links to marxist organisations such as the Portuguese Communist Party, aid from socialist countries and organisations, and the lessons for armed struggle themselves – these parties also developed socialist ideologies and strategies quite distinct from those of the leading parties in 'clientelist' states.

The actual transfer of power to these parties in the mid-1970s took place under conditions that rapidly undermined any likelihood that the three states would continue to develop as socialist states or sustain the participatory forms of politics visible in the early to mid-1970s. Such factors as the shift from managing war to managing the state, the lack of trained cadres, the nature of class processes, the need and desire for rapid development combined with lack of external capital and massive wartime (and post-war) destruction, and external intervention, gave rise to divisions in the party leaderships between those favouring the 'lessons of the war' and those stressing the 'needs of reconstruction'. A centralised and authoritarian form of rule (with some similarities to centralised-bureaucratic rule) developed rapidly, peasants and the urban poor became alienated, corruption and state violence emerged and grew in scale, as did evidence of ethnic divisions influencing politics.

In 1980 ethnic divisions were one of the factors underlying the coup in Bissau which ended the Luis Cabral regime and led to the separation of Cape Verde from mainland Guinea Bissau. In Angola and Mozambique, while party leaders were aware of, and to a degree critical of, the processes outlined above, any cautious attempts to confront and reverse them was undermined by the massive growth in external intervention in the form of sponsored civil war, economic and social destruction, and the mounting costs of military survival. By the late 1980s neither government was in control of its own territory or of the political process, and both had been forced to accept the abandonment of socialism in order to qualify for loans (or, as John Donne put it in *The curse*, one of his most vivid poems, 'and at the last, be circumcised for bread').

Lack of control of the political process became even more apparent in the 1990s (see e.g. Hanlon, 1991). While being kept afloat by external recognition and funding, the two governments have been put through a largely artificial 'democratisation process', seen by some as part of the contemporary 'wave of democratisation' in Africa. Like the events at the same time in certain spoils states (e.g. Zaire, Sierra Leone, Nigeria), these are quite distinct from the democratic struggles in centralised-bureaucratic states, having different origins and outcomes. In this case, the major opposition organisations in each of Angola and Mozambique were unconvincingly converted from terrorist organisations to political parties for the purposes of competing in elections, and the eventual outcome of the electoral process was determined far more by military strength and negotiation between government, opposition and external forces than it was by democratic competition. The new political systems in these states cannot therefore be regarded as predominantly the product of internal forces and processes, and it is premature to attempt to characterise the overall political process since the mid-1970s, other than to see it as a distinct historic path.

Generalisation, Variation and Comparison in African Politics

I have argued that beneath the variability of politics in Africa lie a few frequently repeated and causally entwined sequential patterns of political development. These exhaust the possible sequences, in so far as we are concerned with general patterns. In this sense, I can say that Cameroon and Tanzania are similar, as are Somalia and Liberia, while – *pace* Jackson and Rosberg – Sudan and Senegal are not. Those who argue there exists only one form of contemporary African political system (and by implication one process of political development) are thus either limiting their analysis to one of my categories, or are relying on what must be thought of as mistaken or superficial similarities between states or state histories.

Bayart's seminal study (1993 [1989 French edition]) of the state in Africa, deliberately subtitled 'the politics of the belly', lays stress on politics being 'produced "from the bottom up"' (p. 208), whether we are talking of processes whereby leaders create and reproduce loyalty, consent or fear, or about transformative movements. Although he has much to say about clientelist politics (which in different forms is common to the bulk of the forms of politics I discuss), his study is concerned much more with what I call centralised-bureaucratic politics than it is with clientelist crisis or spoils. A general study of African politics cannot, of course, be required to spend much time on any one state, but of the various states dominated by spoils politics, Bayart provides an extended discussion of only one (Nigeria, where he is concerned with the nature of the Northern elite and divisions within it, pp. 126-33), and a scattered discussion of one other, Zaire. Thus his study in the end tells us much more about states like Cameroon or Togo, and relatively little about Ghana before 1980 (or after), or Somalia, or indeed

Angola and Mozambique. It is not therefore properly to be considered a general study of African politics, but instead a study of one crucial political process within African politics.

Jackson and Rosberg's earlier study (1982), informs the analysis of Sandbrook (1985) and, it would seem, much of the thinking about African politics of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). They argue that all African political systems are instances of 'personal rule', stemming from a state of 'institutionlessness' created by colonial rule and its withdrawal. They, too, are much exercised by clientelism, providing a vivid account of clientelist politics as the politics of personal rule. There are a great many problems with this study – for example, the authors' tendency to pluck empirical detail from different states and different times to illustrate some general phenomenon or process, as if this ahistorical procedure were unproblematic, resulting in a curiously static picture of African politics. The key problem, however, is – inevitably – their concept of leadership and its analytical role. They see leadership as a skill, and as reflecting the intelligence, wisdom and acumen of the ruler, who deploys all these qualities to manage clientelism, remain in power, and rule effectively. What they study in the bulk of the book, however, is not leadership at all, but longevity in power. Their case studies are of those who have ruled for many years; they are able to do so because they are able leaders, and we know they are able leaders because they rule for many years. This empty circularity fits well with the absence of extended study of leadership 'failure' (in their terms) so that we have no analysis of Nigeria, or of any Ghanaian ruler after Nkrumah, or of newer political systems like those of Angola and Mozambique. What Jackson and Rosberg did was to recognise that instability was not endemic to African states, while at the same time failing to realise that stability could not be understood without studying instability (and that in any case it was only a symptom of the growing institutionalisation of centralised-bureaucratic systems).

Some, then, of the variability of African politics, whether seen synchronically or diachronically, can be accounted for in my model by the existence of several different 'histories' to which different clusters of African states belong. Further variation is intrinsic to the nature of these histories, arising from differences in timing, social structure and the pace and direction of class formation, in features of the economy, or of the precise manner and sequencing of the introduction of reforms. There are, finally, features of each individual state that are peculiar to it. These may affect the detailed form of politics that emerges in that state, as with Botswana's precocious development of centralised-bureaucratic politics, or the lack of labour radicalism in 1940s Sierra Leone (and thus of radical nationalism) that was due to the early co-optation of the trade union leadership at the urging of a colonial trade union adviser ahead of his time. It may result, on the other hand, in outcomes and features unique to that state, which are not part of the essence of its political development, and thus do not require explanation in terms of this model. Problems for the model arise only when such *ad hoc* features appear to be fundamental to an account of political development.

One simple implication of this approach is that some forms of comparative politics become less fruitful in African contexts. Since our understanding of (say) corruption, or ethnic politics, or military intervention, will depend on the form of political system within which it occurs and on its precise timing, quantitative analyses (so popular with military intervention) and comparative studies of event categories taken out of context will prove of very limited use. The most important aspect of the Nigerian

coup 1966, the Rawlings coups of 1979 and 1981, and of the 1972 coup in Benin, is that they are they are different sorts of events, and not – except in a banal sense – examples of the same thing. And the ‘problem about corruption’ (Leys, 1965) is then simply that for too long scholars tried to interpret it as a distinct freestanding phenomenon, and not as a feature of certain African political systems and as differing in nature, dynamic and meaning in each system.

Conclusion: Afropessimism vs. Democratic Innovation

In a recent article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the journalist Robert Kaplan (1994) portrays West Africa as epitomising ‘the coming anarchy’ (in which ‘scarcity, crime, over-population, tribalism and disease are rapidly destroying the social fabric of our planet’). The piece pulls together a familiar set of right-wing bogies: crime (as practised by non-whites, of course), AIDS, high birth rates (non-whites again), reversion to subnational loyalties, and the collapse of the state’s capacity to police its citizens. These it combines with a handful of ecological horrors – destruction of the rainforest, water and soil depletion, and rising sea levels. Together, these underpin growing scarcity and insecurity, especially in the ever-expanding cities, which give rise to local wars of great intensity, over control of scarce resources. He summarises Fouad Ajami’s closely related scenario as a future of ‘skinhead Cossacks and *juju* warriors, influenced by the worst refuse of western pop culture and ancient tribal hatreds, and battling over scraps of overused earth in guerilla wars’ (p. 62).

For this *Review* what is important in Kaplan is not his inglorious wallow in prejudice and misinformation, but his reflection of a growing school of thought in the US, and his treatment of Africa as Sierra Leone writ large: ‘Sierra Leone is a microcosm of what is occurring albeit in a more tempered and gradual manner throughout West Africa and much of the underdeveloped world’ (p. 48). I have argued above that Sierra Leone epitomises not Africa – for no one African state can do that – but the terminal stage of spoils politics. Kaplan has neither visited nor studied much of West Africa, let alone Africa as a whole, and relies on naive observation and gossip for the empirical basis for his generalisation. His piece thus bears comparison with scholarly writing on Africa in only one sense: his treatment of contemporary Africa as being marked by one political process, and as heading – but for external intervention – for political, economic and social collapse (see e.g. Jackson, 1992, which relies on ‘personal rule’ analyses).

It is essential to distinguish between differing political processes, even when these appear to be characterised by similar phenomena (corruption, authoritarian rule, ethnic politics, political violence, state erosion etc). Only by doing so will we avoid the unjustified optimism shown in the 1960s and (to a lesser degree) in the early 1990s, and also the tendency to write off Africa as a basket case. The history of post-war political development in Africa shows a limited variety of basic paths, political processes and associated political systems. At the same time it shows the desire and the capacity to experiment and innovate, and the presence of a persistent pressure for democratisation in African politics. This last is visible in radical nationalism, in popular responses to clientelist crisis, in aspects of armed liberation struggle, in populist revolt and other responses (as in Nigeria) to spoils politics, and in recent attempts at democratic restructuring of centralised-bureaucratic states. Thus far this pressure has not given rise to a democratic political system able to survive for long the conditions of its birth and external pressures. But if we are to search for universal features of African politics, then they are to be found in this democratic energy and the

readiness to innovate and reform, and not in the gleeful pessimism of Kaplan, Jackson and others.

The diversity of African politics does not preclude us from producing a systematic account of the process and nature of political development in Africa, seen as the product of interaction between externally imposed forms, the requirements and ambitions of successive dominant groups in African states, and pressures from below for – at the least – accountability, good government and political reform. In the account I have offered that interaction resulted in the appearance of a strictly limited number of forms of politics and associated political systems. At their first appearance some of these represented the capacity for innovation of African political elites, and others the recurring and irrepressible popular demand for democratic political systems. Almost all of these forms have now exhausted their potential, although some, like the centralised-bureaucratic form, are still in existence, and others – like the clientelist politics of the early 1960s – seem to have made a brief reappearance in the early 1990s. If African states are to regain some of their autonomy, then there will have to be a second and more radical wave of innovation, this time directed at the production not of stable, authoritarian and centralised states, but towards stable, decentralised and democratic systems, at regional, national and subnational levels. Western agencies and African leaders, who have been so thoroughly implicated in past failures, can provide neither guidance nor initiative in this process. Those are far more likely to come from within civil society, which already has experience of coping with the breakdown of centralised-bureaucratic systems, and of the far more difficult task of the reconstruction of civil and political life in the aftermath of terminal spoils politics.

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