Nzongola-Ntalaja, G. & Lee, M. (eds). (1997). The *State and Democracy in Africa*. Harare: AAAPS Books.

Reviewed by Jephias Mapuva

The book deliberates on the contentious issue of the role of the state in propagating a democratic dispensation on the African context. Divided into 16 parts, the book takes a thematic approach in dealing with democratic issues in different parts of the African continent. The themes that have been identified in the book are those pertaining to democracy and the democratic transition in   Africa. Through these themes, the contributors attempt to highlight the challenges that the continent has encountered in the post-colonial period and how the unique features of attempting to dispense democratic institutions in different African countries have manifested themselves through allowing space to civil society and other stakeholders in partaking in the democratization process. The issue of the transition from colonial rule to black majority rule is deliberated at length with different contributors bemoaning the democratic decay and diminishing participatory spaces that have characterized most of Africa's post-colonial period and the rise of despotic regimes on the continent. The issue of ethnicity has not been spared and has been manipulated by post-colonial political leaders to fan suspicion, mistrust, and divide nations, and, in some cases, degenerating into violent eruptions.

The thematic approach adopted for the book has enabled readers to comprehend salient issues under discussion. Under the theme, Democracy and the Democratic Transition in Africa, Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja presents a detailed analysis of the concept of democracy, universally as well as in the African context. On the same breath, Nzongola-Ntalaja examines the major challenges that have bedeviled Africa towards a democratic transition, which he views as a moral obligation and imperative, social process as "…a particular type of political practice applicable to all human societies". Nzongola-Ntalaja proceeds by examining the internal and external environments of the democratic transition in Africa and how these have impinged on the continent's propensity to strengthen its democratic institutions. However, the contributor finds fault in Africa's structural organization, which he blames for its unpreparedness to embrace democracy by noting that, "…the neo-patrimonial states of postcolonial Africa are basically hostile to democracy and the democratic transition". He bemoans many African leaders' unpreparedness to embrace democracy full throttle and point out that despite "…their democratic rhetoric notwithstanding, state leaders have used all the means at their disposal to block, undermine, or slow down the democratic transition" on the continent (Nzongola-Ntalaja & Lee (1997:3). As a result, various authors express the view that prospects of a transition to genuine democracy remains bleak as the African leaders continue to cling to power on the backdrop of gross human rights violations and continued erosion of any democratic institutions.

The second theme covers chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 with the main idea being the identification of the main actors and stakeholders in the democratization process, notably civil society. The contributions under this theme, notably by Onalenna Selolwane, Akiiki Mujaju, Mulumbu Mvuluya, and Kalele-ka-Bila, give the onus on the citizens of the African continent to democratize the condiment and should not expect anybody from outside the continent to do it for them by demanding their right to freedom and civil liberties from their rulers. The contributors argue that:

"...democracy can neither be imported from abroad, nor be handed down to the people on a silver platter by African leaders... [as] the people of Africa must democratize the continent on their own" (Nzongola-Ntalaja & Lee, 1997:2).

In the same section, Mujaju addresses the salient concept of civil society as a prominent player and actor in the democratization process. On the same breath, the role of women and students, as well as youth, take center stage in his contributions as these are members of society previous marginalized and yet hold the propensity to influence political processes. Cases of Uganda and Zaire are cited as places where the role of popular masses has been prominent in influencing political transition by toppling despotic regimes. Grassroots organizations are also cited as being a force to reckon with in the democratization process as these have the support of grassroots population groups and have minorities in their midst.

The third theme on the role of the state in democratic transition involves the vexing question of whether the state facilitates or impedes democracy and under what conditions. In this contribution, Margaret Lee examines the challenges that the newly independent South Africa faced during its transition from apartheid to democracy. Lee concludes by noting that

*"...the future of South Africa's fledgling democracy hinges on the Mandela government's performance ....in social progress and improvements in day-to-day living" of its populace. (*Nzongola-Ntalaja & Lee,1997:4).

The case of Nigeria is cited by Jibrin Ibrahim and Said Adejumobi, who concur on the prominence of 'the practice of engineering change from above' as opposed to from below. However, Ibrahim's contribution is a strong indictment against the role of intellectuals, particularly political scientists as architects and managers of the transition charade (Nzongola-Ntalaja & Lee, (1997:5). Adejumobi's contribution examines the most debilitating challenge to democratization on the African continent, that of electoral fraud, which has characterized most of Africa's electoral processes and gives an example of Nigeria's fraudulent electoral process and the post-election political processes, which, in most cases, have been characterized by acronyms, despondency, and mayhem. Ghana and the Portuguese-speaking African countries have also been cited as potential areas for democratic transition, but inhibiting restrictive political environments.

The concluding theme, Human Rights and Democracy, presents a gloomy and appalling human rights record on the continent, which has been the major hindrance to democratic transition in the post-colonial period. Contributors under this theme, namely Horace Campbell and Victor Ayeni, both concur that human rights have been under siege on the African continent and because of this democracy, has found it difficult to take root on the continent because the observance of human rights is synonymous with a transition to democracy. Campbell adopts a Pan-Africanist approach to human rights and democracy and argues that:

"…the problems of democracy, human rights, and peace in Africa cannot be fully understood without reference to the decisions and actions of key actors in the international community and the major world powers and UN agencies" (Nzongola-Ntalaja & Lee,(1997:6*).

Campbell, in his contribution, gives a detailed expose of a progressive agenda for ending all forms of dehumanizing violence, including violence against women in domestic, reproductive, and war situations. Campbell further reaffirms the strong and dialectical linkage between democracy and basic human rights, and sees people-oriented, emancipative, politics as the most promising way to achieving democracy, peace, and security. Ayeni, in his contribution, focuses on women as civic persons with rights to equal access to the protection and opportunities that the state provides for its citizens.

Generally the various contributions point to limitations that the African political dispensation exhibits, which contributes to the curtailment of the creation and strengthening of democratic institutions on the continent. The contributions from the whole book point to the fact that there is still a long way for Africa leaders to adopt, create, and even dispense democratic practices within their citizens.

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