

Africa (Up)Rising: Confronting the New Authoritarianism

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INTRODUCTION

ALLOW ME TO start to by thanking Larry Diamond, Bill Murray and all the great teams at the Hass Centre and the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law (CDDRL) for making it possible for me to be with you here today. It is a double honour to be asked to deliver this lecture that I had tentatively titled: Africa Rising or Uprising: Confronting the New Authoritarianism.

I am not an academic though as people at home have realized via Twitter that I have the honour to be the Mimi and Peter E. Hass & CDDRL Distinguished Visitor for 2015 at Stanford University. This news has been received with a mixture of alarm, excitement for those who are pleased for me and good riddance for some of the many interlocutors I have accumulated over the years on the anti-corruption front. Most of my professional life I have worked in civil society mainly focused on anti-corruption, in the media as a columnist, a civil servant in the government of Kenya and as an advisor to governments and the private sector on issues of governance generally. I continue to be seized and committed to the general welfare of those in my country and continent who have not had the good fortune that I have had. In that respect it has been my singular privilege over the years to be allowed into the homes and lives of a vast cross section of citizens in what has become the most enduring lesson from life — this sharing — even with those who apparently have so little to give but whom you soon realize are far wealthier than many of us in the most important ways in life.

My lessons therefore as I speak about Africa in general are drawn heavily from my own experience in Kenya and a number of other countries on the continent regarding the democratic trajectory on which we are apparently currently embarked.

AFRICA'S CENTURY

This is Africa's century. We are the last continent to line up its economic ducks in a row in a context where there is enough of a middle class to deliver on the policies necessary to move us to middle income status. Africa's economy was the size of Russia's in 2008 at US\$1.6 trillion and growth across the continent was booming. Only a third of this was driven by the extractive sector. The rest was by services, transportation, infrastructure, agriculture and other sectors.

This is combined with a massive youth bulge (in Kenya 75 percent of the population is below 34 and 50 percent below 18) - a giant workforce that is the healthiest, best educated and most globalised in history. Then there has been the discovery of untapped natural resources on an unprecedented scale. A powerful narrative of 'Africa Rising' has captured the global imagination and big money has rushed to the continent to take advantage of the

rich pickings before the field becomes too crowded. The key challenges confronting Africa's rise are deepening authoritarianism that I have seen described as the 'resilience of the past'; identity-based fragmentation along ethnic and religious lines; corruption and deepening income inequality that's easily politicised, mobilised and at the most extreme, ultimately militarised. Indeed, improving economic prospects have been accompanied not with an expansion of political space but shrinkage. This contrasts with the last spurt of democratic expansion in the early 1990s. Indeed, elites have been able to use the political independence afforded by the new affluence to embark on a reversal of some of the hard-won freedoms of two decades ago: in terms of the space for media, civil society, and, the political opposition to function. Rapidly deepening impunity with regard to corruption has caused Kenya to slide still lower at the bottom rung of the world's most corrupt countries according to Transparency International 2014 index.

Kenya's case is unique, however, as we had a near civil war following rigged elections in 2007 while in 2013 the controversially elected President and Deputy President we voted in while under indictment for war crimes at the International Criminal Court (ICC). The subsequent democratic reversals and deepening impunity with regard to corruption are set in this unique self-fulfilling context.

So while the macro-economic measures of progress have been positive, poverty has been replaced by a far more volatile condition of widespread inequality. At the same time the widespread phenomena of growth without jobs and democratic voice without accountability has become increasingly apparent.

'AFRICA RISING' OR 'AFRICA UPRISING'? OR BOTH?

Its ironic that Kenya and a host of African countries faces the kind of political challenges and opportunities they do at a time when an economic take-off is apparently imminent. In the short-term instead we have Africa Uprising, because the truth is that the region has started to convulse. Critically, we now acknowledge the extent to which violence is being used as a political tool. From Egypt, Libya and Tunisia in the Maghreb, to Nigeria, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Central African Republic, Guinea Bissau, Niger and also the meltdowns in Somalia and South Sudan, we are learning that the 'rising', 'the growing up' will be extremely painful in the short term.

In truth democracy has reigned supreme since the fall of the Berlin Wall but while totalitarianism has taken a seemingly permanent setback, authoritarianism never went away. We wanted it to but its resurgence today is in part fed by the fact that today's dictators have learnt how to manipulate geopolitical realities better than their predecessors. There is a sophistication to the authoritarian slippage that's underway. Don't go looking for an Idi Amin or a Mobutu Sese Seko. Today's autocrats wear Gucci, studied here in the West, employ the best spin doctors and speak in a language and use words that have global agency: accountability, transparency, good governance etc.

These new and improved deluxe models of authoritarianism have some of the characteristics of traditional fascist states. Analysing the situation with colleagues over

the past year and half since the last election in Kenya we have been drawn to Dr. Lawrence Britt's 2003 characteristics of a fascist state as we try and understand the character of the authoritarianism Kenya is sliding back into:

What we have is pre-feudal authoritarianism, warlordism where the dictatorship is incomplete.

- i. **Powerful and Continuing Nationalism** - Where the regime strives to conjure powerful and continuing nationalistic narratives making constant use of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs, and other paraphernalia. Flags are seen everywhere, as are flag symbols on clothing and in public displays.
- ii. **Disdain for the Recognition of Human Rights** - Because of fear of enemies and the need for security, the people in fascist regimes are persuaded that human rights can be ignored in certain cases because of "need." The people tend to look the other way or even approve of torture, summary executions, assassinations, long incarcerations of prisoners, etc. Since 2012 Kenya dozens of Muslim clerics and Imams have been assassinated in Kenya for example. Similarly hundreds of young men associated with outlawed gangs have also disappeared or been murdered. This condition has been normalized.
- iii. **Identification of Enemies/Scapegoats as a Unifying Cause** - the attempt to rally people into a unifying patriotic frenzy over the need to eliminate a perceived common threat or foe: racial, ethnic or religious minorities; liberals; communists; socialists, terrorists, etc. In Kenya it is the Muslims increasingly, in a country that never had a problem with sectarianism.
- iv. **Supremacy of the Military** - Even when there are widespread domestic problems, the military is given a disproportionate amount of government funding, and the domestic agenda is neglected. Soldiers and military service are glamorized.
- v. **Rampant Sexism** - The governments of fascist nations tend to be almost exclusively male-dominated. Under fascist regimes, traditional gender roles are made more rigid. Divorce, abortion and homosexuality are suppressed and the state is represented as the ultimate guardian of the family institution.
- vi. **Controlled Mass Media** - Sometimes to media is directly controlled by the government, but in other cases, the media is indirectly controlled by government regulation, or sympathetic media spokespeople and executives. Censorship, especially in wartime, is very common.
- vii. **Obsession with National Security** - Fear is used as a motivational tool by the government over the masses.
- viii. **Religion and Government are Intertwined** - *this affected the capacity of the Church to play the role of honest arbiter during the crisis of 2007/8 and they've never recovered. The current regime was elected after a campaign in 2012 that saw rallies dubbed prayer meetings officiated by Bishops and other clergy. Governments*

in fascist nations tend to use the most common religion in the nation as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Religious rhetoric and terminology is common from government leaders, even when the major tenets of the religion are diametrically opposed to the government's policies or actions.

- ix. **Corporate Power is Protected - The industrial and business aristocracy of a fascist nation often are the ones who put the government leaders into power, creating a mutually beneficial business/government relationship and power elite.**
- x. **Labor Power is Suppressed - Because the organizing power of labor is the only real threat to a fascist government, labor unions are either eliminated entirely, or are severely suppressed.**
- xi. **Disdain for Intellectuals and the Arts - Fascist nations tend to promote and tolerate open hostility to higher education, and academia. It is not uncommon for professors and other academics to be censored or even arrested. Free expression in the arts and letters is openly attacked. The regime's supporters have published a list called the 'Evil Society' of foreign funded enemies of the state that has been purveyed as far as the International Criminal Court. Additionally a wrath of legislation to manage and muzzle civil society has been orchestrated.**
- xii. **Obsession with Crime and Punishment - Under fascist regimes, the police are given almost limitless power to enforce laws. The people are often willing to overlook police abuses and even forego civil liberties in the name of patriotism. There is often a national police force with virtually unlimited power in fascist nations.**
- xiii. **Rampant Cronyism and Corruption - Fascist regimes almost always are governed by groups of friends and associates who appoint each other to government positions and use governmental power and authority to protect their friends from accountability. It is not uncommon in fascist regimes for national resources and even treasures to be appropriated or even outright stolen by government leaders. In Kenya's case the corruption is so rampant that the security organs are unable to prosecute their core mandates effectively.**
- xiv. **Fraudulent Elections - Sometimes elections in fascist nations are a complete sham. Other times elections are manipulated by smear campaigns against or even assassination of opposition candidates, use of legislation to control voting numbers or political district boundaries, and manipulation of the media. Fascist nations also typically use their judiciaries to manipulate or control elections. *The last two elections have been highly contentious and the conditions do not currently exist for a national poll that would not divide the Kenyan people still further accompanied by violence before and or after.***

THAT IS THE KENYAN CASE. THERE ARE COMMON DENOMINATORS THAT ARE BECOMING APPARENT ACROSS THE CONTINENT VIS-À-VIS DEMOCRATIC REVERSALS:

- i. **The boom in the extractives sector. The troubling reality is that in the past, the discovery of on-shore oil and other high value minerals in Africa has often led to instability and violence. It has meant that elites have the resources to consolidate their hold on power less encumbered than before by international norms regarding human rights and good governance.**
- ii. **The war against terror has led to major geopolitical changes that haven't helped the democratic cause. Authoritarian leaders often make more efficient partners in the War Against Terror. We have found they are better at interfering with, following, beating up, capturing and killing terrorists and getting away with it even if they only catching the right guys half the time. The war against terror isn't cold, it's hot, asymmetrical and existential to the Western way of life.**
- iii. **Authoritarian regimes like China and Russia are in the ascendance, rich and offering an alternative to the Western liberal model. The west seems to have lost its confidence and interest too. They have been pummelled by the:**
 - a. **2008 financial crisis**
 - b. **The rise of the BRICS and their assertive self confident posture globally especially that of China and Russia**
 - c. **The war in Afghanistan and the nature of their departure therefrom**
 - d. **The war in Iraq and the existential security concern caused by virulent blowback that has emerged in the form of extremist political Islam**
 - e. **Wikileaks: and its linkages to the Arab Spring**
 - f. **Edward Snowden's revelations**
 - g. **The Fiscal Cliff here in the USA too though to a lesser extent because it was not really understood in much of the developing world where going broke is more frequent as opposed to the United States**

THERE ARE OTHER ENDURING REALITIES THAT HAVE CAUSED AUTHORITARIAN TENDENCIES TO FLOURISH ONCE AGAIN:

I should like to argue these are the following:

THE RESILIENCE OF IDENTITY POLITICS

- i. **We underrated the resilience of identity politics generally and ethnic sub-nationalism and its ability to sustain patrimonial systems of governance that are inimical to the building of modern states, the rule of law, the institutions of accountability. Indeed, ethnic sub-nationalism cheats States of their monopoly over coercive power. And so a tribe can more or less take over the government in Yemen. The end all of this is that the democracies of most of the Third World will never look like Sweden, America or Norway. We are coming to terms with this. The resilience of identity politics, of ethnicity and tribalism despite economic growth creating a middle class that should aspire to an impersonal state means important changes are needed that I touch on below.**

Because of the above we must accept the continuing huge currency of culture and identity that overwhelms democratic traditions, institutions and processes. The reaction is a zero-sum-game patrimonial politics that can be stagnating, turbulent and easily violent.

GRAND CORRUPTION RETURNS

- ii. **Third, grand corruption, indeed, looting is back because WE CAN and because we have the resources. The international community has lost the power and diplomatic leverage to do anything about it. Civil society and media can be co-opted, confused or intimidated; the opposition can be bought off and disassembled by elites using state resources. The China effect has been destabilising on this front, as theirs is an authoritarian but efficient state model. Attempts to copy it in Africa lead to patrimonial increasingly unstable states as they attempt to impose governance models that are completely at variance with the aspirations of the majority of their people.**

The financial crisis in the West exposed the reach of graft and how hard it is to uproot. The concentration of wealth in a few hands has seen those few gain a disproportionate power over policy making deepening the loss of public confidence in politicians and political parties.

NATION BUILDING BEFORE STATE BUILDING

- iii. **The democratic setbacks that are kicking in now around the world have and can be attributed partly to the failure to build effective modern states. I should like to argue that in many parts of the world frustration with state building is caused by the fact that we are still also embroiled in a prior nation-building phase.**

Nation-building is about softer software type issues like those that flow so often from the mouths of many in the Middle East on both sides of the war against terror divide: dignity, honour, respect. Nation building is about tradition over rules; practices over processes; the oral over the written; the collective consciousness over the logical. Building a state in a low-trust ethnically heterogeneous environment is difficult if you don't build the Nation first. Lee Kuan Yew, Mahathir Mohammed, Julius Nyerere, Thomas Sankara were nation-builders.

'Legitimate Authority'

Nation building efforts that are understood as such even if not articulated explicitly confer legitimacy on elites who carry them out and the states they craft. Nations are built by leaders and elites often to save themselves from war, accountability, loss of status and privilege, to avoid 'crisis', 'uncertainty', about the future. It's a software not hardware issue. So one can ask, "at what point does the law become pragmatic tool for managing each other's behaviour for an elite?" This requires meritocratic, enforcement that's unbiased and perceived to be

largely unbiased. The one public good that's key is TRUST. It comes from keeping promises; inspiring hope that things will improve; questioning the durability of current unpleasant realities. This creates 'legitimate authority'. In a polarised context where the prevailing political culture especially has been one of patrimonialism this is more important than delivering other public goods like roads, hospitals and schools because people ask first: "where is the school being built and for who?" ...

Some Nation-Building Characteristics that cause democracy to endure when it kicks in:

- i. Collective trauma
- ii. Deliberate counterintuitive policy that forges new identities
- iii. An articulated scepticism regarding commonly accepted international ideological economic, political and social frameworks on the part of the elite

Authoritarians can forge a sense of nationhood that can in turn later start of a flourishing democratic state but it's important to also examine those cases where the state-building project has been embarked upon while the nation-building one remains incomplete or lacking in legitimacy among the majority in a population – this denies the state legitimate authority.

REDEFINING OUR DEMOCRACY

It has become clear that the African Century will have to be accompanied with a considerable dose of political engineering just to hold things together. This is as true in Kenya as it is of other countries. Our famed resilience will be tested as we engage with the realities of "democracy ... the worst form of government except all the others".

The divisiveness of our first-past-the-post system of elections means we'll have to transform our democratic system to accommodate what are too often our belligerent identities. We ask ourselves whether our democracy is properly inclusive, representative, responsive and containing within it the legitimate mechanisms to 'self-correct' political problems. That is the foundation.

1. Proportional representation is a way of mitigating ethnicity
2. Political party state finance
3. Devolution is Kenya's current political safety valve
4. Realising that legitimacy is not only conferred by election processes but by traditions, associations – both modern and ancient.
5. Independent guardian institutions that Philippe C. Schmitter talks about

At the end of the day, however, regardless of the current condition of reversals, Africans, however, remain committed to democracy. Though democratic space is shrinking it's now harder to put a genie back in the bottle than to put in there in the first place.