

Is Democracy Possible? A Theoretical Perspective

Dr. Beverlyne Asiko Ambuyo* Mr. Benard Odoyo Okal Dr. Deborah Nanyama Amukowa
Maseno University, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of Kiswahili and other African Languages,
P.o box 333 – 41050, Maseno, Kenya

Abstract

Democracy can be defined as a government in which sovereignty lies with the people either directly or via representatives. The transition from monarchy to representative democracy was long, gradual process. Nevertheless, democracies seem to change with the changing times and cultures. There are many who believe that democracy is a construct of the West, molded in response to the peculiar historical circumstances that shaped it, others argue that freedom and democracy, while suitable in some parts of the world are by no means universal goods. The global spread of democracy has been accompanied by the global spread of criticisms of democracy. For many of us, the debate about democratization is anything but theoretical. Basing its arguments on the normative utilitarian perspective, this paper intends to discuss the possibilities of democracy even in dissenting antidemocratic thoughts especially in party politics. This is because democracy is the one form of government which evolves constantly to ensure that it is possible through a self-correcting system.

Keywords: Democracy, Antidemocratic, Party Politics, Normative Utilitarian perspective

1.0 Introduction

Over the past three decades, democracy has enjoyed a remarkable rise. Mandelbaum (2007) notes that in 1900 only 10 countries could be counted as democracies. By mid-century the number had increased to 30 and 25 years later it remained there. By 2005, however 119 of the World's 190 countries were democracies. To understand how this happened we must have a proper understanding of democracy itself. Democracy is a single integrated, readily identifiable political system. It came about through the infusion of two political traditions; liberty which is often called freedom and popular sovereignty or self government. Liberty belongs to individuals, while popular sovereignty is a property of the community as a whole. Liberty involves the dos and don'ts of the government to its citizens whereas self government has to do with the way those who govern are chosen. The more democracy is applied beyond the state, in regional and transnational governance, the more we need conceptual tools to decide whether we are actually talking about increased democracy or prerequisites to create and enhance democracy. In political theory we are so fascinated with institutional designs, institutional solutions to problems of governance that we often forget the conceptual clarity, such that we don't really know what we are talking about when we talk about democracy and what it really entails. First we make a distinction between the concept of democracy and theories of democracy. The concept of democracy, in its simplest form, can be defined using the two Greek words *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule) that combine to make the word democracy, meaning "rule by the people". Essential to democracy is the ideal of freedom and the principal of popular sovereignty. This is the classical idea of democracy. Beetham (1993) elaborates this concept as a "mode of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control, and the most democratic arrangement to be that where all members of the collective enjoy effective equal rights to take part in such decision making directly. Theories of democracy attempt to make this basic concept operational by prescribing how democracy might be realized. This is done ideally by setting the institutional form and the content of democracy. As regards these issues there is no general agreement. For instance Samarasinghe (1994) argues that those who favor the extension of democracy beyond the political sphere by emphasizing social democracy want economic and social decision making processes to be participatory as far as possible, and when that is not feasible, representative. Held (1993) proposes a cosmopolitan model of democracy that has two dimensions, international and local. International democracy requires the global system including the United Nations to be democratized. This means reducing the powers of the leading Western countries in the U.N. and other global institutions. Democracy at the local level requires strengthening the democratic base of civil society including economic and social organization. This broader conception of democracy has two problems. The economic dimension of democracy requires an economic organization, especially in the ownership of property that is not fully compatible with the tenets of free enterprise and capitalism. A more equitable distribution of property may require state intervention that is also antithetical to the conception of liberal democracy. This is because liberal democracy is foremost about individualism, about securing rights which protect the individual. Secondly, this broader concept of democracy is an ideal model. However, as Sartori (1979; 2005) points out, the contemporary theory draws a distinction between "ideal system and reality". There is a "fact-versus-value" tension. The question of interest, especially to those who want to promote democracy is, to what extent and in what manner are ideals realized and realizable. Thus, most theories of democracy take a more narrow view of democracy, confining it to the political sphere at the individual country level. They usually recognize the

interrelationship between political and socio-economic factors. The principal concern, however, is with political democracy. In this paper, we will discuss the pro and anti democracy views basing on theoretical perspective of democracy in the political sphere and to be more specific the political parties as tools of democracy. Meanwhile, basing on these we will briefly assess a few East Africa experiences and eventually give a remark on the possibilities of democracy.

2.0 Political Democracy

Schumpeter (1947) defined competitive democracy as “The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.” Two points are worth noting. First, this is a theory of political democracy. Secondly, it is a theory of democracy that focuses on the procedural (input) aspect of the political process. Dahl’s definition of democracy as an “elective oligarchy” complements and extends the Schumpeterian theory of democracy by incorporating an element of pluralism to it (Dahl, 1971). This makes Dahl’s conception more participatory and inclusive. However, his approach also retains the procedural/ input framework. Extending Dahl’s concept of oligarchy, Diamond (1990:2-3) defines democracy as a “system of government that meets three essential conditions: meaningful and extensive **competition** among individuals and groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a highly inclusive level of **political participation** in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair elections, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of **civil and political liberties** - freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations - sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.” Even in regard to the input aspect of democracy the Schumpeterian view is seriously flawed at least in three aspects, especially when the theory is applied to developing countries. Firstly, non-elected public officials make critical decisions that are largely outside the purview of elected officials. For example, much of economic policy, particularly the decisions of relatively independent central banks, fall into this category. Secondly, the military frequently exercise power even when democratically elected governments exist. Third, although the government is elected, the majority can discriminate against the minority, the ethnic conflicts that we see in East African countries for example bear testimony to this. To rectify these shortcomings Schmitter and Karl (1991) have added three important qualifications to the Schumpeterian formulation of competitive theory of democracy. Citizens must be able to influence public policy between elections. Second, properly elected governments must be able to exercise power without control by unelected officials. Third, the polity must be self-governing. Sartori (1979) makes the important point that the above formulations are Western conceptions of democracy that limit it to the input side (procedural element) of the political process and hence inadequate as a theory of democracy for developing countries. He notes that the state is a key factor in developing countries. Thus, a theory of liberal democracy that stresses the limitation of the role of the state is not always relevant to these societies. What is required is a theory of democracy that incorporates the outcomes of the political process as a feed-back to the competitive input process. The output side of democracy relates to elements such as political stability, protection of minority rights, and the ability to achieve economic progress with a reasonable degree of social equity. If the output of competitive democracy does not fulfill these minimum requirements, competitive democracy on the input side is not meaningful to those who are on the losing side, be it a minority, or any other group such as the urban or rural poor. From this point of view a model of political democracy that simply restricts its focus to civil and political rights would be inadequate it will also have to include social and economic rights (Maiyo, 2008).

2.1. Possibilities of democracy

Is Democracy possible? Is democracy a myth or a dream? Is it really possible to have a completely democratic society where everyone participates either directly or indirectly in governance and the governors are completely open and accountable to their citizens? Political equality and being binded politically are necessary conditions for the concept of democracy. Political equality is a system where every member has a right to participate in governance issues whereas political bindingness is the thought that people to rule over themselves through a political authority, thereby making themselves authors of the law, they have to bind themselves as equals to this authority. Under modern conditions, this authorization is usually made by taking part (directly or indirectly) in the decision making or at a minimum accepting the constitutionalized procedures as valid, without which the right to participate would not have any binding force (Gilley, 2009).

Now that democracy is the typical form of government consideration of the varieties of democracy and how they can be improved is a progressive endeavor. Gilley (2009) observes that more books describe the many improvements possible in democracy, from involving citizens to deliberate efforts to make public, to tinkering with electoral rules. In other cases the dissent is destructive because it aims not to improve but to eliminate it altogether. Critics of democracy come in two varieties; the first questions democracy feasibility while the second question democracy desirability. Dissenting claims about the desirability of democracy are grounded in personal

dissatisfaction with democratic outcomes. Some people feel that democracy is not desirable especially when their point of view is defeated in favor of the other and it does not matter how open the procedure was, to them it is obviously undemocratic. They feel that democracy is not desirable because it causes repression, inequality, westernization, instability mob rule and inefficiency.

Dissenting claims that democracy is infeasible are more corrosive as they threaten to weaken the very idea of democracy- the notion that citizens situated as political equals can exercise common control over political power. They focus on the unwillingness of citizen to take up the heavy burden of self rule or on the logical problems of translating individual preferences into public choices on one hand and focus on difference in power and resources or on the elites force to fool or mystify the people. Gilley (2009) explains that some theorist like from Marx through Chomsky insists that democracy is not possible because of propaganda, power differences, social exclusion, agenda control while others like Plato through Burke says that it is due to citizens stupidity, ignorance and aggregation problem. Hence it should be replaced by mass party rule, worker rule and direct citizen rule. In this focus therefore through the political parties is democracy really possible?

2.1.1 Political parties in historical perspective

Popular sovereignty burst upon the World with the French revolution of 1789, which brought forth the idea that sovereign power should reside in the people as a whole rather than in hereditary monarchs. Since it is infeasible for all of the people to govern themselves directly all the time representative government developed with the people choosing their representative in free, fair, open elections in which adults have a right to vote. The large body of knowledge, theoretical assumptions and models of interpreting political party systems has largely been developed from western experiences as noted above. Maiyo (2008) observes that political parties in the classical sense are a product of the industrial revolution characterized by rapid socio-economic developments and attendant social and class conflicts arising from cleavages between the ruling class and the workers. These tensions provided for the development of distinct social movements with clear ideologies and interests. Political parties thus emerged out of mass social organization to meet the challenges of the day.

In the post World War II and Cold War era, the rapid socio-economic changes led to a transformation of the political system where governing became more technical and the mass media became the main medium of electoral communication. Consequently, party cadres and membership became increasingly redundant as party leaders by-passed them and communicated directly with the electorate (Hague & Harrop, 2007).

The historical, social, economic and political realities shaping the development of African political party systems are however markedly different and require a new set of theoretical tools and approaches in order to fully capture the essence of their role in African politics.

2.1.2. Political Parties in Democratic Theory

Political parties are central institutions of modern democratic governance. The general consensus in comparative political thought and among policy makers is that political parties play a central role in deepening and fostering democracy in both established as well as emerging democratic polities (Maiyo, 2008). The relevance of political parties in the organization of modern politics and governance is not a recent phenomenon of contemporary societies. Political parties have been part and parcel of political organization since the creation of the nation state. Political parties are essentially products of social organization for political power and are best studied and understood in juxtaposition with the social-historical forces at play providing the context in which they emerge and operate. As early as the 18th century, Edmund Burke described a political party as “a body of men united for promoting, by their joint endeavors, the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed” (Churchill, 1963). Modern political parties however exhibit three distinct characteristics lacking in Burke’s definition. First, they have become more organized and centralized institutions with bureaucratic structures, secretariats and paid staffers as seen in many countries of the world. Secondly, modern parties do not necessarily work towards a national interest, but any kind of interest including regional, ethnic, racial, religious or economic objectives, for example Republican (conservatives) and Democrats (liberal) in the USA. Parties are not organized along a “particular principle” as many manifest a conglomeration of varying interests, ideologies, principles and objectives. Third, political parties are largely organized with the sole objective of competing for and capturing political office (Hague & Harrop, 2007). The nature, forms and functions of political parties have continued to evolve in response to socio-economic and political changes in society. The element of competition and striving to govern is a central component of modern political parties.

Another definition by Maliyamkono & Kanyongolo (2003) is that “a political party is an organized association of people working together to compete for political office and to promote agreed-upon policies”. This is the definition that surely suits the East African countries, as political leaders with their supporters are brought together under one umbrella of a political party ideally to strategically work out for a political office. I am reluctant to accept the second part “promoting the agreed on policies” because in most cases these are always just paper policies and the practical bit always faces many challenges and at times avoided by the same policy makers.

The various perspectives underlying the principles of political parties makes it complexity to get a

specific way of expressing the term political party.

2.1.3. Political parties and normative utilitarianism perspective

The foregoing conceptualization of political parties is derived from a general consensus on the utilitarian and functional view of their perceived “usefulness” in modern democracies. According to Sartori (2005) the primary democratic function of political parties is to link the citizenry with the government an observation that had been earlier on echoed by Diamond (1997). Biezen (2004) observes that in order to play this role effectively, political parties have to provide opportunities for effective participation by party members, activists and leaders in the party’s decision making processes. These include the articulation and aggregating of diverse interests, recruitment and preparation of candidates for electoral office, crafting policy alternatives and setting the policy agenda, organizing and participating in electoral competition and forming effective government and thus integrating groups and individuals into the democratic process. Maiyo (2008) explains further that, political parties not only provide the means by which citizens can participate in the governance process, but also structure the political landscape to enable competition between varying interests and policy objectives. This characterizes the classification of political regimes advanced by Dahl (1971) which categorizes democratic processes along the two dimensions of political competition and political participation. Political parties as forms of social organization continue to evolve or emerge in response to changing socio-economic and political realities. Modernization theorists such as Huntington (1968) argue that the significance of political parties goes beyond the mere utilitarian function of contesting and capturing or retaining political power. According to this theory, political parties are necessary and crucial institutions in the construction of a stable and participatory political order as well as ensuring progressive modernization and development. That is to say they serve the important function of interest aggregation, channeling disparate social groupings and interests into a common socio-political platform and thus providing a stabilizing effect within members of a particular political party to an otherwise fractious society. This is because members of one political party will always champion their interest against the opponent parties.

Consequently, the normative conceptualization of political parties draws largely from studies based on social and political developments in western societies. The normative approaches to party politics are particularly popular among policy makers, democracy building advocates and democracy assistance programmed in emerging or post “Third Wave” democracies (Huntington 1991, Welzel & Inglehard 2008; 2010). These programmed are often carried out by surrogate institutions of established political parties or political order in western democracies. They often propagate the view that their form of political organization is the ideal to which emerging democracies ought to emulate. Modernization theory’s appeal therefore lies in the perceived ability of political parties to provide a unifying force in the face of deep rooted and pre-existing social cleavages such as ethnicity, regionalism, caste, racism, clannism or religious differences that often ignite social tensions and in some cases civil conflict. In order to fulfill these normative functions, Manning (2005) argues that political parties are expected to have a strong social base, offer distinctive platforms which appeal to a core set of voters and be able to attract and retain party activists and potential leaders.

3.0. The case of East Africa

Normative approaches to the study and analysis of political parties in Africa tend to assume prescriptive perspectives that imply some sort of structural imposition as opposed to appreciation of organic development of parties (Janda, 2005). Maiyo (2008) expresses that African political parties are products of distinct historical, socio-economic and political conditions that influence their character and functioning different from those prevailing in western democracies. The only somewhat parallel historical point with the European model was the immediate pre and post independence period when African political parties were broad-based mass liberation movements embodying a single ideology of liberation from colonial rule. Independence political parties, formulated under the single ideology of majority African rule provided a unifying force among societies that were historically antagonistic along ethnic lines. Unlike the majority of their western counterparts almost all African nation states (with the exception of countries such as Somalia) lack in distinctive cultural or ethno-linguistic homogeneity. They are highly heterogeneous along ethnic, regional, religious or clan cleavages. Although western European polities such as the Netherlands may have had rifts encompassing Calvinists, Socialists, Catholics, western entrepreneurs, southern small farmers etc, they remained relatively stable and political competition was contained within established structures and traditions (NIMD, 2008). African societies on the other hand lack in socially entrenched and institutionalized political, social and governance structures along which political competition can be channeled. They are therefore highly fractious and fragile. Political competition and organization tends to follow these pre-existing fault lines which in turn determine the structure of political parties. More often political parties resorted to mobilizing people along the issues that are ready at hand – ethnicity, opposition to structural economic reform – without regard for the long-term consequences as it can be observed in East African countries.

Modernization theory to this extent therefore, falls short of capturing the essence of post third wave

African political parties. Instead of providing stability and ordering the political system, reigning in divisive and potentially explosive social forces, African political parties and the elites that control them tend to play on these very social cleavages to gain power through inherently undemocratic means. This characterization seems to affirm Michel's (1968) assertion that political parties have an inherent tendency towards oligarchy. According to this approach, not only do political parties develop undemocratic characteristics in the way they control and manipulate social cleavages, but also in their internal organization and decision-making processes. According to Michel, the more parties become organized institutions, the less democratic they become. This structuralist approach contends that regardless of political party's formal rules about internal checks and balances, organization led to centralization of power, oligarchy and the decline of internal democracy (Kavanagh, 2003).

The majority of East African political parties are poorly organized and lack institutional capacity, their decision making processes are unstructured and power often lies in the hands of the party leader and a few of his cronies who are usually wealthy enough to bankroll the party (Wanjohi, 2003). The role of the party membership is reduced to a bare minimum, usually to endorse decisions already made by the elite. Political mobilization assumes the form of personality cults and loyalty is often to the party leader as opposed to the party as an institution. This encourages the politics of "party hopping" where leadership disagreements may lead to one leader migrating from one party to another and carrying his supporters with him/her as is evident in East African countries. However, there are various mechanisms that are being put in place to curb this behavior. For example in Kenya strict and firm regulations are in place for political parties to comply with before they are registered and legible for any election but as developing democracies for how long will this stand the test of democracy? Will the same leaders circumnavigate to change these golden rules to suit their own interests? As we ask ourselves this valuable questions the rate at which merging and reorganization of political parties before 2013 elections was alarming. The same trend is evident in 2017 elections. Politicians seem to be shifting alliances depending on the political wave that seem favorable. All this is done for their own political mileage rather than enhancing democracy. Most of the small parties have been put together to form two major coalitions. In 2013 it was all about the Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD) and Jubilee, now we have Jubilee Alliance Party (JAP) and National Super Alliance (NASA). All these are replicating the previous party manifestos and are being championed by the same old politicians.

On the other extreme are the well organized, highly centralized and structured parties that have been in power since independence such as CCM in Tanzania. Centralization then takes away decision making power from lower party organs and branches and concentrates it on a core group of party oligarchs such as the Central Committee of the CCM. Such parties are usually found in single-party regimes where the party and the state are so fused that they became indistinguishable from each other (Maiyo, 2008). Whatever the case may be, both categories of parties, either by default or design, are considerably lacking in internal democracy. Other approaches advanced to explain the democratic deficit between African political parties and a truly representative democracy include developmental theory which argues that certain minimum socio-economic pre-conditions are necessary for democracy to thrive. It further argues that the low socio-economic condition of the African polity and the distinct lack of clear ideological foundations, allow for the development of clientelism and patronage based political structures through which access to, and distribution of state resources can be channeled. Another important point to note is that contemporary political parties are characterized by the decreasing influence of individual party members, lack of specific class appeal in favor of other pre-existing social cleavages in order to appeal to voter support base, increasing autonomy of the leadership from internal checks and balances, and the complete lack of ideology in the party's programs.

In Africa especially, the continuing debate on the sequencing of democracy and development as well as the developmental prerequisites for democracy is more pertinent. Some African leaders such as Kenya's former President Daniel Arap Moi have advanced similar arguments to explain their preference for single party rule (The Standard, July 22, 2008). Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni imposed a total proscription of political party activity on the grounds that political parties breed conflict in fragile nation states; they are authoritarian, urban based groupings of small elites; they are corrupt; they have no clear policies; there is a lack of a middle class to support their existence; they are manipulated by external actors to achieve neo-colonial or imperial interests by proxy; or that other systems are more democratic than multiparty systems (Okuku, 2002). Moreover, the elections that were held on February 18, 2016 were marred with several questionable instances with regard to a democratic free and fair election. This is due to the way the opposition leader, Besigye and his supporters were not given the freedom that is defined in an "ideal" democratic society. While some of these attributes may apply to some political parties in East African countries, it is certainly not the case that they are an accurate characterization of all political parties. Maiyo (2008) argues that political parties may not be the cause, but rather a reflection of pre-existing social cleavages and prescription or restriction of political party activity may not be the solution to these problems. Counter intuitively, effective and well functioning political parties can serve as a pressure valve by which social tensions and frustrations can be channeled through peaceful means. The importance of well functioning, effective and internally democratic political parties cannot therefore be

overstated. Political parties that guarantee a degree of effective and transparent membership participation in deliberation of policy, leadership selection and overall decision making can instead provide avenues for social cohesion, minimize possibilities of open conflict and facilitate peaceful resolution of conflict. As we cannot overlook the fact that real democracy in a country begins with effective internal democracy within various political parties.

However as observed by German scholar Michels (1962) the “iron law of oligarchy” which argues that political parties are inherently undemocratic and have a tendency towards oligarchy where the party elite and leadership assume control of the party at the expense of the party membership. According to this argument, intra-party democracy is therefore inconsistent with the elite preference for highly organized, structured and institutionalized party systems. Oligarchic political parties tend to have highly centralized and non-inclusive decision making processes and are therefore not internally democratic. In such a situation mostly you find that when a party leader is no more the party seems to die or its strength cannot be felt. Some democratic theorists like Teorell (1999) argue that intra-party democracy weakens political parties and is therefore undesirable. He further says that Proponents of this view argue that in order to serve democratic ends, political parties themselves must be ruled by oligarchic principles. These two positions represent the deep divide and debate that surrounds the very normative and prescriptive approach to intra-party democracy especially as seen in East African countries. Taking into account the nature of African party politics as discussed above, intra-party democracy would play a significant role in processes of consolidating and entrenching a democratic culture in African societies.

Intra-party democracy is not a universally popular notion and several arguments have been advanced against it based on the assumption that democratic decision making processes are prone to inefficiency. Too much internal democracy, it is argued, is likely to weaken the ability of a political party to compete against its opponents. Democratic principles demand that leadership at all levels be elective, that it be frequently renewed, collective in character, weak in authority. Organized in this fashion, a party is not well armed for the struggles of politics (Maiyo, 2008). Opposition to intra-party democracy is based on a key characteristic of western political parties faced with ever declining membership and the increasingly central role that party activists take as a result. The assumption is that party activists tend to take more extreme ideological positions than the party leadership or the electorate.

Intra-party democracy is also seen as lessening party cohesion while increasing the risk of internal dissension. This impinges on party efficiency as more energy and time is spent on internal competition and conflict resolution as opposed to concentrating on the core priorities of electoral and governmental success. This may seem to make oligarchy a more appealing option for presenting a united front, both to the electorate and the opposing parties. Representative democrats are therefore likely to defend oligarchy as the best means to allow pragmatic party leadership to have direct access to and representation of the electorate thus by-passing party activists.

Proponents of the competitive model of democracy (Schumpeter 1947; Sartori 1979), argue that a system of competitive political parties is necessary for effective interest aggregation and the channeling of those in competing for government. Competitive democrats therefore view intra-party democracy as threatening the efficiency and compromising the competitiveness of political parties and thereby threatening democracy itself.

Comparative political approaches to democracy such as competitive, representative or deliberative democracy seem to present compelling arguments against intra-party democracy in favor of oligarchy. The discourse hinges on the normative choice between direct (participatory) democracy and representative democracy.

In the most part, East African political parties are not characterized by the presence of an influential core of party activists. Consequently, such theoretical basis for the arguments against intra-party democracy developed in the west doesn't apply. To the contrary, the fractious nature of African societies and the poor institutionalization of political parties can be advanced as key arguments against intra-party democracy. The threat of internal discord, leadership wrangles; parties split and in some cases open violence present real challenges for intra-party democracy in Africa. These factors further weaken largely unstable African political parties, compromise their ability to select credible candidates, compete in elections and govern effectively and in some cases lead to the total collapse of political parties. This is evident in the Kenyan politics within the ODM party; the need to elect the presidential flag bearer between the Prime Minister, Mr. Odinga and the Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Mudavadi to some extent weakened the party in 2013 elections. Now again they seem to be regrouping in preparation for 2017 elections, time is the best test of party democracy in this case. The majority of East African political parties are therefore more oligarchic than democratic in practice. Most do not have membership lists and when they do, these are not necessarily exclusive. Voters tend to have multiple party memberships and party loyalty fluctuates significantly. Allegiances are usually to the party leader as opposed the institution of the party. The foregoing arguments against intra-party democracy may seem plausible enough to warrant no further discussion on the matter. There are however compelling reasons to consider intra-party

democracy desirable, not only for political parties but in the interest of democracy in the wider society as well.

Arguments in favor of intra-party democracy derive from the appeal of democracy in the wider sense as a system that facilitates citizen-self rule, permits the broadest deliberation in determining public policy and constitutionally guaranteeing all the freedoms necessary for open political competition (Joseph, 1997). This approach combines perspectives of participatory and deliberative democracy that emphasize the central features of participation and contestation. The case for intra-party democracy depends on whether one adopts a liberal or participatory democracy perspective. Liberal democratic theory does not place a high premium on intra-party democracy since according to this approach, the political leadership plays the most important role while the citizen's participation during elections is merely to accept or reject their leaders. For the liberal democrat, democracy is not an end in itself, but is only important in so far as it safeguards liberty better than any other system (Katz, 1997). Participatory democrats place a high premium on citizen participation in political processes and a sense of civic responsibility. Most East African political parties practice an intra-party democracy through the delegates. However, in most cases the level of knowledge and their objectivity in decision making is always questionable. This is because most of them are easily manipulated by the "so called" party leaders and in order for them to remain relevant they often tore the line. In essence since participatory model of democracy in the form of direct democracy is not feasible in modern large and complex societies, political parties bridge the gap between citizens and government by providing avenues for citizen's participation through effective intra-party democracy.

Other arguments in favor of intra-party democracy suggest that it encourages political equality by creating a level playing field in candidate selection and policy development within the party; ensures popular control of government by extending democratic norms to party organizations such as transparency and accountability; and it improves the quality of public debate by fostering inclusive and deliberative practices within parties (Gauja, 2006).

In East Africa, political parties are perceived more as vehicles for contesting and attaining public office as opposed to institutions of democratic consolidation. The desirability of intra-party democracy is therefore more likely to be viewed in terms of its usefulness in improving the overall effectiveness of the party against its competitors (Wanjohi, 2003).

However (Maiyo 2008) expresses that the success of intra-party democracy in East Africa therefore lies in a normative approach that seeks to change attitudes towards a process oriented approach. This is the more pertinent in light of the weak social base on which democracy is founded in most of the continent's polities. Attention should thus be paid to processes that entrench a democratic culture by increasing citizens and nurturing their political competence. In such polities where levels of civic awareness are extremely low, intra-party democracy provides opportunities to expand civic education and awareness through participation while at the same time devolving power and decision making processes to broader sections of society.

2.3 Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is arguable that there is a crisis of legitimacy among African political parties characterized by a lack of internal democracy and poor institutional development. This may well explain the failure to further consolidate initial democratic gains in the majority of African polities. Still, political parties continue to play a central role as pillars of democracy in the wider society. The gains made after the initial wave of democratization in the early 1990s, characterized by the collapse of single party autocratic or dictatorial regimes may thus be waning (Maiyo, 2008). The political leaders also seem to be coming to terms with the real democratic situation and that is why they are keen to stick to the constitutionalized period to rule. The challenge is how to differentiate between good, consolidated or real democracies with bad or fake democracies as we theoretically look at the possibilities of democracy through political parties. However, some new or struggling democracies have managed to achieve a relatively open and fair political competition yet remain stuck in patterns of weak representation and a persistent disconnection of citizens from the political system. This is through the party's structures and the participation level in decision making. From this discussion democracy is possible although some democratic reforms must be undertaken with care as history has shown that any attempt to reform a working democracy invites the danger of being manipulated by powerful elites seeking more power for themselves. As much as we cannot give definite ideal features of a successful democratic society, democracy must always balance the need for reform against the risk of undertaking it and it must uphold the rule of law and the good of the citizens without discrimination.

References

- Beetham, David. 1993. "Liberal Democracy and the Limits Democratization" in Held, David (ed). *Prospects for Democracy; North, South, East, West*. Stanford:Stanford University Press, 55-73.
- Biezen van, I. (2004) *How Political Parties Shape Democracy: Perspectives from Democratic Theory*, Birmingham, University of Birmingham.

- Dahl, R. (1971) *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- De A Samarasighe, R. W. S. (1994). *Series on Democracy and Health: Democracy and Democratization in Developing Countries*. Department of population & International Health, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston: Massachussets
- Diamond, Larry et al. (1990). "Introduction: Comparing Experiences with Democracy" in Diamond, L., Linz, J. J., Lipset, S. M. eds. *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, p.1-35.
- Churchill, W. (1963) *The Great Democracies*, Bantam Books.
- Gauja, A. (2006) *Enforcing democracy? Towards a regulatory regime for the implementation of intra-party democracy*, Canberra, Democratic Audit of Australia. 73
- Gilley, B. (2009). *Is Democracy Possible?* *Journal of Democracy* 20 (1) 111-127. National Endowment for Democracy and The Johns Hopkins University Press
- Hague, R. & Harrop, M. (2007) *Comparative Government and Politics*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Held, D. (1993). "Democracy: From City-states to a Cosmopolitan Order?" in Held David (ed). *Prospects for Democracy: North, South, East West*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 13-52.
- Huntington, S. P. (1968) *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Joseph, R. R. (1997) *Democratization in Africa after 1989: Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives*, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 3, *Transitions to Democracy: A Special Issue in Memory of Dankwart A. Rustow*, pp. 363-382, Brill.
- Kavanagh, D. (2003) *Party Democracy and Political Marketing: No Place for Amateurs?* Paper Presented at the Conference on Political Communications in the Global World, at Mainz, 30-31 October 2003.
- Katz, R. S. (1997) *Democracy and Elections*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Maliyamkono, T.L. & Kanyongolo F.E. (2003) *When Political Parties Clash*, Dar es Salaam, ESAURP.
- Manning C. (2005) *Assessing African Party Systems After the Third Wave*, in *Party Politics* Vol. 11 No. 6 pp 707-727. London, Sage.
- Maiyo, J. (2008). *Political Parties and Intra party Democracy in East Africa: From Representative to Participatory Democracy*. Unpublished thesis. African Studies Centre - Leiden University.
- Michels, R. (1968) *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, The Free Press - Macmillan, New York and London.
- NIMD, (2008) *The Dutch Political System in a Nutshell*, NIMD, The Hague.
- NIMD, (2004). *A framework for Democratic Party Building*, The Hague.
- Okuku, J. (2002) *Ethnicity, State Power and the Democratisation Process in Uganda*, Nordic African Institute, Uppsala.
- Sartori, G. (1976) *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sartori, G. (2005) *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Colchester, ECPR.
- Scarrow, S. (2005) *Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspectives: Implementing Intra-party democracy*, National Democratic Institute.
- Schmitter, P. C. and Karl, T. L. (1991). *Exploring Meanings of Democracy to Provide Guidelines for Policy*. Washington, D.C.: United States
- Agency for International Development USAID, (unpublished manuscript). (A shorter version is published in the *Journal of Democracy* (Summer 1991, 2:75-88) under the title "What Democracy is -- and Is Not").
- Schumpeter, J. A. (1947). *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. 2nd ed. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Teorell, J. (1999) *A Deliberative Defence of Intra-Party Democracy in Party Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 363-382, SAGE, London Thousand Oaks New Delhi
- Wanjohi, N. G. (2005) *State of Political Parties in Kenya and the Transition to Democracy*, in *Democratic Transition in East Africa*, Dar es Salaam, REDET.
- Wanjohi, N. G. (2003) *Sustainability of Political Parties in Kenya*, in Salih, M.A.M. (Ed) *African political parties: Evolution, institutionalism and governance*. Sterling, VA: Pluto Press.
- Welzel, C. & Inglehard, R. (2008). "The Role of Ordinary People in Democratisation." In *Referal of Democracy* 19 (1), 126-140.
- Welzel, C. & Inglehard, R. (2010). "Changing Mass priorities the link between modernization and democracy in Perspectives on Politics, 8 (2), 551-567.

Authors

Beverlyne Asiko Ambuyo (PhD)*

Holds a doctoral degree (2013) from Maseno University, MA in Kiswahili (2007) from Kenyatta University and B. ED (Arts) (2001) from Maseno University, Kenya. Specialist in Pure Linguistics, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, Politeness, Governance and Democracy. Author of various articles in National and International Journals.

Benard Odoyo Okal

Holds M.Phil. (Swahili Studies) from Moi University, Kenya. Finalizing PhD degree in Kiswahili at Maseno University. Author of various articles in both National and International journals. Specialist in pure Linguistics, Lexicography Discourse Analysis and also interested in issues on Governance and Democracy.

Deborah Nanyama Amukowa (PhD)

Holds a Doctoral degree (2013) and MA in Kiswahili (2005) from Maseno University, Kenya. BA degree (1994) from Egerton University. Major field of study is Literary Studies in Kiswahili also having interest in Research on Communication and issues on Governance and Democracy. A member of various National and International Associations and Professional bodies: CHAUKIDU, CHAKITA, CHAKAMA & CHAKIMAKE