

CRITICISMS OF MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY:
PARALLELS BETWEEN WAMBA-DIA-WAMBA AND ARENDT.

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Is Africa becoming more democratic in the 1990's? A sharp increase in multiparty democracy might seem to attest to the victory of democracy in Africa -- unless the presence of multiparty democracy alone may not be a sufficient indicator of the status of democracy. Thirty years ago, Arendt criticized both multiparty and one-party democracy, advocating a more grassroots involvement in localized politics. In the 1960's, Fanon and other African critics likewise criticized what party politics was doing to the newly-independent states of Africa.

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Since 1990, Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba of University of Dar-Es-Saalam has written several articles from a contemporary African angle, suggesting criticisms of multiparty and one-party democracy that parallel Arendt's analysis.

Wamba-dia-Wamba is an important and influential scholar who specializes in the history of ideas as well as the history of political economy. He has recently spent several years as President of the Executive Committee of CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa). In his work for the past ten years with CODESRIA, he has coordinated research on social movements, social transformation, and democracy in Africa, recently resulting in an edited collection of research articles.¹ In addition, Wamba-dia-Wamba served as East Africa Editor for Quest: Philosophical Discussions, An International African Journal of Philosophy from 1988-1996. This journal has been an important communication medium for philosophical ideas concerning Africa. Wamba-dia-Wamba often used his role as editor to instigate debate on issues of Africa and democracy, publishing articles on the topic and inviting others to respond in subsequent issues in the journal. Wamba-dia-Wamba was also a key presenter at a conference held in 1993 at Erasmus University of Rotterdam regarding the process of democratization in Africa since 1989. Several African and European philosophers commented on Wamba-dia-Wamba's ideas at that time, and the papers have been collected into a book.²

Wamba-dia-Wamba argues that while the IMF/World Bank stipulates that one-party systems must be replaced with

multiparty ones, people's real political emancipation gets lost in the shuffle. While Wamba-dia-Wamba favors people's political movements, which he thinks can draw upon a traditional African paradigm of community involvement, one wonders if such movements can act as viable alternatives to parties, especially when the present global political consensus recognizes no alternatives to the modern State.

Several African scholars have responded to Wamba-dia-Wamba's provocative statements, mostly to cheer him on and echo his complaints about current developments. Some elaborate on the various aspects of African political traditions which could serve as models for African alternatives. This is all well and good; but none of the commentators seriously analyzes the role of Party and State as Wamba-dia-Wamba does. Some of the critics understood him as advocating the rejection of Western ideas and a return to past traditions of African politics. However, Wamba-dia-Wamba has clarified his position, denying he suggests a return to the past. Yet he does not reject movements which "creatively reactivate ideas which once emerged in the past..."³ Neither does he reject all ideas from the West, thus escaping Wiredu's charge that he rejects all Western ideas "other than the particular version of Marxist-Leninism which is music to his ears."⁴ Rather, Wamba-dia-Wamba, in critiquing socialist and one-party states, should impress Wiredu by his commitment to look critically at all ideas, indigenous or foreign, and to decide whether they are appropriate for contemporary Africa - a methodology for "conceptual decolonization" that Wiredu suggests

himself.

Accordingly, this paper will analyze and compare Arendt's and Wamba-dia-Wamba's paradigms of politics. Its author is confident that the resulting dialogue of ideas will help Africans who seek alternatives to both multiparty and one-party States. Although Wamba-dia-Wamba does not mention Arendt's ideas anywhere in his work, the parallels in thinking and strategy are extensive enough to warrant comment and evaluation.

A look at both thinkers' works will suggest tentative models for the form democracy would best take in Africa, and perhaps even the rest of the world. Their points of agreement will suggest that most existing democratic systems are far from the ideal of government of, by, and for the people. The functioning of the State, which lies behind all forms of parliamentarian and party politics, must be challenged by people's emancipative movements.

Wamba-dia-Wamba and Arendt on Party Politics

At present, many African states have been pressured to adopt multiparty politics to supplant previous one-party or military rule (for example, in Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Cameroon). This pressure comes from international aid and loan agencies like the IMF and the World Bank. Although a great many Africans definitely wish the dictatorial regimes would go, they have mixed feelings about the multiparty scenarios that are in some countries replacing them. As Wamba-dia-Wamba notes, no one has bothered to analyze why

multiparty politics failed in Africa in the 60's. Historically, one after one, parties put in power by multiparty elections dissolved the opposition parties and ruthlessly consolidated their power, creating one-party states (as in Kenya, Benin, Cameroon, and Zaire). In addition, some multiparty and one-party states suffered military coups (such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Uganda). Although human rights organizations rightly express outrage at the summary executions and imprisonment without trial that often accompanied one-party consolidation, the belief that the solution lies in restoring multiparty rule is perhaps too facile. Such thinking, and such easy capitulation to international bodies, according to Wambadia-Wamba, threatens to fetishize the State. The State is seen as needing to be kept intact and in the parliamentary mold, since it is needed to collect currently vital international aid.⁵

He argues that even in Europe multiparty politics has the same negative consequences one finds in Africa. While parties are supposed to coalesce around certain political ideals and values, their practical foundation is otherwise. In Italy and Japan, he suggests, we see evidence that "most of the self-styled parties are not parties at all, but clientelist, family and corruption based state organizations."⁶ Multipartyism is now, whether in Europe or Africa, just a state organization to divide up positions in government. Regardless of evidence of problems with the political setup, there remains a Western arrogance that the "First World" is doing it right, and the rest

of the world must catch up. Democracy is thus seen by the politically dominant countries as a "frozen model" to export everywhere.⁷

Hannah Arendt notes as well the checkered career of multiparty democracy. The party system in Europe had been short-lived; it began in Europe in the 19th century, mostly after 1848, and lasted only about forty years. By the time Hitler came to power, most European countries had adopted some form of dictatorship and discarded the party system. Americans were embarrassed to admit this fact and tried to overlook it, insisting that the party system be reinstated in Europe after the Second World War, because it had "worked" in the United States. The reasons for its failure in Europe are complex. According to Arendt, people became frustrated with the party system, and were attracted to mass movements which claimed to operate outside it. Like Wamba-dia-Wamba, Arendt states that the problem with multiparty systems is that each party is formed around private interest. Whichever party one belongs to, one can only feel oneself being "part of the whole", with the State, phantom-like, existing above the parties.⁸

Wamba-dia-Wamba noted that in Africa, the one-party states followed quickly upon the newly independent multiparty states. For Arendt that is no surprise, and she surmises that one-party dictatorships are the last stage in the development of the nation-state in general, and the multiparty system in particular. One-party rule rests on the seizure of power when one party receives a majority of votes. Oftentimes such moves

are made in attempts to stabilize an otherwise ever-changing and unstable multiparty government. Such actions also close the otherwise yawning gap between government and State.⁹

Arendt argues that two-party systems as in Britain and the U.S. have been more successful than multiparty setups. This is because, in a two-party system, the party not in power consoles itself with the knowledge that it will be the "party of tomorrow." Parties take turns constituting the government. Arendt notes, however, that such transitions can only go smoothly if the two parties agree fundamentally on a range of issues, so that temporary loss of power is not devastating. Arendt quotes Arthur Holcombe: "If [the two parties] had not been substantially the same, submission to the victor would have been intolerable to the vanquished."¹⁰ This will mean that citizens have limited real choices in elections, with both parties being only variations on a theme.

Moreover, it is difficult to purposely legislate two-party systems. Technically, the U.S. is a multiparty government, since third (and fourth) parties are legal and have indeed been tried over the years. Practically, it is a two-party system, since the two main parties capture the bulk of the vote. But how can a newly constituted government insist that there should be only two parties and that they should take turns governing? Babangida tried to do so in Nigeria- he banned all parties except two which he created, the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention, "in an attempt to reflect the American reality as much as possible, even in name."¹¹ It is no

surprise when these forced attempts at party-creating do not work.

One-party States

An early critic of the role of parties in independent Africa was Frantz Fanon. In Wretched of the Earth, he recounts that the struggle for colonial independence and self-government, already problematic in many ways, was further complicated by the fact that the native bourgeoisie who wanted independence modeled themselves after the European party structures. Fanon complains that the party mentality forced its framework in an *a priori* way upon the then existing structures.¹²

Fanon explains that the native elites believed that the party's role was to supervise the masses, "not in order to make sure that they really participate in the business of governing the nation, but in order to remind them constantly that the government expects from them obedience and discipline." The native bourgeoisie, in Fanon's words, first tried to govern "with the help of the people, but soon [governed] against them."¹³

Fanon describes the scenario whereby the native bourgeoisie creates its party, challenges all other parties, and then, once independence is granted, takes over, behaving much like the former rulers:

The embryo opposition parties are liquidated by beatings or stonings. The opposition candidates see their houses set on fire. The police increase their provocations. In these

conditions, you may be sure, the party is unchallenged and 99.99% of the votes are cast for the government candidate... The party, instead of welcoming the expression of popular discontent, instead of taking for its fundamental purpose the free flow of ideas from the people up to the government, forms a screen, and forbids such ideas. The party leaders behave like common sergeant-majors, frequently reminding the people of the need for "silence in the ranks." This party which used to call itself the servant of the people, which used to claim that it worked for the full expression of the people's will, as soon as the colonial power puts the country into its control hastens to send the people back to their caves.¹⁴

Fanon complains that the single party system dominates and bullies the people. Even if the party system means well, and objectively progressive reforms are made, the rural masses won't support them, remaining suspicious of changes whose purpose has never been explained. Here, we see Fanon, much like Arendt, critiquing the ruler-ruled system where the government gives orders and the people obey. Instead, he advocates the revolutionary system of educating and organizing the people to rule themselves. Fanon exhorts his Africa to quit playing a game of "catch-up" with Europe, and discover its own, more natural form of government.¹⁵

Wamba-dia-Wamba has a complementary criticism of one-party states. He charges, as did Fanon before him, that neo-colonialism is not independence.¹⁶ Parties, no matter how noble

their values, have as their goal the occupation of State positions rather than their destruction or transformation. With a single party, people outside the party do not exist politically.¹⁷ He complains that no "revolutionary parties" have ever been truly emancipative.¹⁸ Here Wamba-dia-Wamba decisively defies the pigeonhole of "Marxist-Leninist" by rejecting the idea of salvation through the "vanguard party." Instead, he notes that even Marxists have played the role of missionaries bringing "enlightenment" to Africa, and suggests that African Marxists do wrong when they treat Marxism as a technology to be applied to Africa like any other context. Being an intellectual requires avoiding one-sidedness. Instead of kowtowing to the Marxists or the capitalists, he insists that what Africans need is the revitalization of their capacity to think (especially free from the influence of donors).¹⁹ The importance of thinking, and of practicing "enlarged mentality," i.e., seeing a situation from multiple points of view, is similarly emphasized by Arendt.²⁰

Fanon argues that liberation cannot be given as an act of charity by the former colonial masters through the IMF or other institutions. Rather, it must be fought for. However, this fight cannot take place in the Marxist-Leninist sense of a fight to control state power and install the correct people's party. He counsels against armed insurrection because, where it has been tried, as in Peru and Cambodia, "it is not winning."²¹ Besides, such action only further reifies the State. Africa has wrongly seen the State as the site of revolutionary power. In

fact, to reduce politics to the State is to "abscond from politics."²² To understand Wamba-dia-Wamba's disillusion with the State as the place of political action, we need to focus on his idea of political action and ask where, if not in the State apparatus, such action can and should take place.

Let us begin with his description of political consciousness, characterized by its active, prescriptive relationship with reality. The political attitude realizes that a given state of affairs need not remain so. Indeed, he insists politics is a "creative invention," and so differs greatly from mere administration.²³ This parallels Arendt's emphasis on natality, the human ability to begin something new and different, as central to action.²⁴ However, Wamba-dia-Wamba cites not Arendt but Sylvain Lazarus, a professor of anthropology at the University of Paris, whose political theory involves "sites" and "militants," emerging or passing from existence depending on conditions.²⁵ He uses village assemblies and councils, as well as a (sometimes national) "palavering community," as examples of sites for politics in Zaire/Congo. Lumumba first saw even parliament as a site for politics, but he quickly and increasingly "found himself a prisoner inside his own government," which was modeled on colonial state apparatuses.²⁶ Historically, Wamba-dia-Wamba sees the Assembly in ancient Greece and the Convention in the French Revolution as examples of political sites.²⁷ The sites serve as centers for speech about issues central to a given community. Ancient Greece, often considered paradigmatic of democracy, did not

structure itself as a multiparty government. In the African context, he cites examples of the Palaver (*ntungasani*) which is "the collective open mutual self-questioning and self-criticism organized to resolve the crisis... every speaking person of the community called upon to discuss the affairs of the community."

He also refers to the *Mbongi*, "where male members of the lineage shared their daily needs, experiences, desires, worries and meals."²⁸ He insists that "without those sites, politics ceases to exist."²⁹

Wamba-dia-Wamba's examples of sites of politics parallel Arendt's descriptions of "public space," a necessary prerequisite for political action. Political action in its paradigmatic, full sense entails sharing of opinions and ideas in public with one's peers, in a context where the goal of speech is disinterestedly (or unselfishly) promoting the common good of society. Action is agreed upon by the community and done "in concert," avoiding ruler/ruled, command/obedience relationships among the citizens. As d'Entreves explains, Arendt's conception of politics is based on "the idea of collective citizenship, that is, on the value and importance of civic engagement and collective deliberation about all matters affecting the political community."³⁰

In Arendt's work, we see her scanning history for a few examples of such public gatherings and spaces of politics. She finds them in some of the same places as Wamba-dia-Wamba, e.g., the Athenian agora and the Parisian councils. However, Wamba-dia-Wamba has added a particularly helpful dimension by giving

examples from Africa, which Arendt completely overlooked, probably due to Eurocentrism.³¹ Many accounts of African politics note the presence of both hierarchical and decentralized governmental models. Some decentralized models, such as the Igbo of Western Nigeria, could indeed serve as additional examples of public spaces.³² Some of Wamba-dia-Wamba's examples from traditional Africa, which exclude women from the public space, are problematic, falling short of today's definitions of participatory democracy (as does, in fact, ancient Greece). However, Wamba-dia-Wamba explains that he is not for restoring tradition intact; rather, he wants movements to adapt promising features of tradition to today's needs.

It is important to note that Wamba-dia-Wamba does not use just any example from African political tradition as the paradigm for politics of the future. He particularly seeks examples of peers associating in public gathering for free speech. Therefore, he does not anywhere advocate an increased role for traditional chiefs, kings and Queen Mothers. Despite recent arguments that such personages are actually democratic rather than aristocratic, due to their popular election and their mandate to serve the people, they are nonetheless at best representatives.³³ Since his critique of the party system is a critique of representative democracy, in favor of the council system of direct people's participation, African kings and queens cannot interest Wamba-dia-Wamba as models, even if he accepts the evidence that they are representatives.

Arendt laments the diminishing of participatory democracy

and its replacement, by the party system, of people as actors with representatives who act for, on behalf, and therefore instead of the people. As she explains, councils arose contemporaneously with parties. However, their genesis is different. Councils occur spontaneously during revolutions. Parties always precede or come after revolutions, bringing the issue of popular suffrage. Councils challenged the party systems in all their forms. Parties, as defined by Arendt, provide parliamentary government with support of the people through voting. But parliaments, as representative bodies, take away people's chance to act politically themselves.³⁴

Richard Bernstein explains Arendt's longstanding advocacy of councils and politics "from the bottom up" as due to her horror and frustrations with the lack of Jewish attempts to organize resistance to the Nazi holocaust. She wanted the Jewish people to assume political responsibility and to fight against anti-Semitism. An attitude of obedience to the government, no matter how cruel it was, helped to aid in the destruction of a people.³⁵ Sitton points out, however, that Arendt's enthusiasm for councils was always limited to neighborhood councils, not workers' councils; she was concerned with territorial, not functional, units. Through neighborhood councils, one could have a direct experience of politics; such an experience has value beyond the merely instrumental goals of politics.³⁶

In contrast to councils, under a party system, the people, by voting, support, while the government acts. For believers in

such a system, people's direct participation in public affairs, as in councils, signifies its decay or perversion. The party system was supposed to represent; the people shouldn't need to do anything. It thus becomes apparent that the party and council systems will always be at odds.³⁷ One is reminded of Kaunda's claim as new President of independent Zambia, that the freedom fighters, whose special talent is to "communicate with the people" and motivate them "to act and suffer together," become somewhat obsolete once freedom is gained, for most government posts will be filled by degreed intellectuals trained in administration.³⁸

With parties, Arendt complains, the relationship of the people to the party becomes one of buyer to seller. In modern party government, "the voter can only consent or refuse to ratify a choice which... is made without him." The party system reinforces inequality by replacing "government of the people by the people" with "government of the people *by an elite sprung from the people*."³⁹ It is very questionable whether representatives, once voted into office, actually represent the wishes of their constituency. Often, Arendt insists, the representatives satisfy desires that they themselves create.⁴⁰

Arendt was disillusioned with voting and representational government. In the 1970's, regarding politics in the United States (which is serving now as a model for all of Africa thanks to IMF/World Bank guidelines), she said, "Representative government itself is in a crisis today, partly because it has lost, in the course of time, all institutions that permitted the

citizens' actual participation, and partly because it is now gravely affected by the disease from which the system suffers: bureaucratization and the two parties' tendency to represent nobody except the party machines." The "freedom to choose" found in voting is a very limited freedom. Freedom in its fullest sense is found in action itself. It consists in direct participation. But in representative democracy, the only "freedom" citizens are offered is the choice of who will act for them and instead of them. Voting is hardly an experience of free political action at all. After the vote, the citizen goes back to being a private person until the next vote.⁴¹

As Arendt explained, the vote itself is no longer a sign of self-rule; the citizen has no power. The most the vote can accomplish is to try to stop the abuse of power, now in the hands of the government. Voters can get their interests represented, only through a kind of blackmail of the vote: large groups will refuse to vote for a representative unless he or she sides with them. Or voters can hire lobbyists. But that kind of power is very different from the power that arises out of joint action, where people accomplish things on their own as a community, instead of using their meager power to influence the minds and actions of elected officials. In such a degenerate political situation, the people have two options: they will either react with lethargy, or with a spirit of resistance.⁴² This is not only a problem of the last few generations; Thomas Jefferson called the U.S. government as it was unfolding in his time "elective despotism", where the only

difference between it and despotism in general is that the people get to choose who will be the despots. He warned that if people ever became inattentive to public affairs, the politicians would become wolves.⁴³

Arendt describes some defenses recurringly used by party-dominated governments, whether one-, two-, or multiparty systems, against councils and people's movements. First, existing channels and institutions (or as Arendt says, public spaces) which were based on participation were destroyed by violence. Or, in the case of the United States, where violence wasn't used, overlooked and omitted from the Constitution. Then, after the party system asserts itself as the only government, the apathy (or fear) it generates among the people makes it easy for the party system to stay in power. People remain isolated from each other, give up on public happiness, and look for happiness in their private lives instead. Thus it is not the apathy of citizens that makes the government resort to representation, but the reverse: the imposition of the party system on people encourages them to be apathetic.

The above critique is not a complaint that individual party members, or particular parties, are corrupt, inept, or inefficient; it is a more sweeping condemnation of representation as a political form. I suggest that just this kind of critique underlies Wamba-dia-Wamba's criticism of multiparty government. As he complains regarding Zaire/Congo, political reforms there "aimed at constructing a parliamentary state with or without the people's involvement... Rules for

rules' sake, courtesy, etc., were considered more important than political truths..."⁴⁴ Reforms were inadequate because Mobutu's opponents did not have an adequate grasp of just how wrong things were. Criticizing the Mobutu regime as "dictatorship" and "personalized state," they didn't realize that "the mere disappearance of Mobutu will not destroy his regime."⁴⁵ The ruling class wanted a parliamentary form of the state "stripped of *Mobutuiste* militarism and extravagances of personal exercise of power, but not necessarily of its Western sponsorship." Their goal was limited- to make the rules of accumulation fairer than they had been under Mobutu. For Wamba-dia-Wamba, these aspirations fall short of what Zaire/Congo really needs: sovereignty or emancipation for its people, be they peasants, workers, students, women or children.⁴⁶ Now that Mobutu is gone, there is renewed opportunity for people's movements, but due to their prior oppression and isolation, it may take a while before the people regain their practice of political action.

That Western powers had been satisfied with the "reforms" in Zaire/Congo proves the need to distinguish democracy as imperialist policy from democracy as people's political capacity for self-control.⁴⁷ (1993:98) Wamba-dia-Wamba charges that supporters of capitalism, in charge of IMF/World Bank funds, have reduced the notion of democratic transition to multipartyism, democratic constitution, and laissez-faire policies, without giving a single example of how such procedures have "...led to social and political self-emancipation of the People. It is merely assumed that the process will eventually

lead to self-emancipation."⁴⁸

Wamba-dia-Wamba has defined democratization as "a process of struggles to win, defend and protect rights of people (producers, women, minorities) and individuals, against one-sidedness... including the right of self-organization for autonomy and not necessarily the right of participation in the state process."⁴⁹ By his definition he has shown that he considers empty democratic "form" to be worthless if it is not resulting in emancipation for the people. On this point he has had some critics. Tobias Louw is concerned that the *palaver*-methods of resolving conflict in indigenous communities may not be practical for "... the more functionalistic demands and styles of life (determined by criteria such as utility, competitiveness, productivity and efficiency)."⁵⁰ Jan Hoogland cautions that with any actually functioning democratic system there will be problems with living up to an ideal standard. So the gap between African governments and the democratic ideal must not be completely condemned but rather understood as an example of the usual gap between ideal and reality.⁵¹ But Wamba-dia-Wamba does not interpret the Euro-American and IMF/ World Bank interest in establishing multiparty democracy in Africa as an example of a humble attempt to improve government that will eventually result in a more perfect democracy. Rather he refers to the "triumphalist imposition of monopolization" in which Western powers now indulge after the end of the Cold War. He also notes that: "While the West consumes about 2/3 of World resources, there is increasingly no *normative* desire or attempt

to democratize the situation."⁵² Such observations reveal the hypocrisy of the Western advocacy of democracy.

Realistic Alternatives to Party Representation?

Many of the governments Arendt endorses did have representatives of some sort. The early colonies that Arendt praises as not being governments of rulers and the ruled had their own representatives, "freely chosen by the consent of loving friends and neighbors." And in the popular societies of France, which she also praised, there were elected presidents. So Arendt does not oppose representatives as such, but the representative structure as it exists today.⁵³

Although there is no place for rulership in Arendt's politics, there is a place for leadership. A leader is sensitive to the fact that most things cannot be accomplished by a lone individual; the group effort aspect of any action is admitted and emphasized. No matter how brilliant one's ideas are, other collaborators are needed to bring those ideas to fruition. A leader will want input from others to improve or criticize the plans.

Arendt says that the problem with today's political "elite" is that it is chosen according to standards that are profoundly unpolitical. Party systems discourage authentically political talents. True politicians can hardly survive "the petty maneuvers of party politics." Today's politicians are primarily salespeople, with the virtues of good salespeople. She holds up as a paradigm the "elite" of the council system, but she

distinguishes it from any elite that had ever gone before:

The councils were also an elite, they were even the only political elite, of the people and sprung from the people, the modern world has ever seen, but they were not nominated from above or supported from below. With respect to the elementary councils that sprang up wherever people lived or worked together, one is tempted to say that they had selected themselves; those who organized themselves were those who cared and those who took the initiative; they were the political elite of the people brought into the open by the revolution. From these 'elementary republics', the councilmen then chose their deputies for the next higher council, and these deputies, again, were selected by their peers, they were not subject to any pressure either from above or from below. Their title rested on nothing but the confidence of their equals.⁵⁴

Here Arendt describes the paradigm for a representative government that is not repressive. Although it probably results in a pyramid-shaped government, which is the shape of any authoritative government, the authority is structured totally differently from most governments:

But while, in all authoritarian government we know of, authority is filtered down from above, in this case authority would have been generated neither at the top nor at the bottom, but on each of the pyramid's layers; and this obviously could constitute the solution to one of the most serious problems of all modern politics, which is not

how to reconcile freedom and equality but how to reconcile authority and equality.⁵⁵

In Arendt's alternative scenario, the people are full participants. The authority of their own local government arises from the fact that the people have agreed upon these issues and made mutually binding promises. Their government needs no other authority than that: as with the Mayflower compact, a basis of mutual promise and compact is sufficient.⁵⁶

Is this juster form of representative government possible, or is it all a dream? Arendt insists that it has happened several times in history. A good example is Hungary in 1956. Councils of all sorts- writers', artists', workers', etc.- within a few days began a process of coordination and integration, creating higher councils. Then delegates to the assembly were chosen. It was a perfect example of the federal principle: a league and alliance among separate units. This organization sprang up naturally, and was not premeditated or chosen because of worries about large territories. According to Arendt, human beings are political animals, and this self-government springs up spontaneously when people are given a chance to express themselves politically.⁵⁷

To supplement Arendt's examples, Wamba-dia-Wamba has a vast array drawn from indigenous governments in Africa. Many community practices are intact. African communities would not be starting from scratch, were they to try today to find an alternative to the party system. Other African thinkers have argued similar points. For example, Anthony Appiah cites an

interesting example from Ghana, where the central, top-down government collapsed for a while in the mid-1970's. Appiah notes that if Hobbes were right, without the "Leviathan" to keep order, people would begin killing each other. Instead, voluntary associations, along lines that Arendt would admire, stepped in and took over the business that had been relegated to government. Indeed, such societies are always active, calling into question the indispensability of the "modern State." Appiah notes that in rural Ghana, "disputes are more likely to end up in arbitration, between the heads of families, or in the court of 'traditional' chiefs and queen mothers;" most even preferred such contexts to the colonial-based legal system. Churches have been more instrumental than the State in financing, building, staffing and equipping schools and hospitals in response to community needs. They also maintained homes for orphans and the mentally ill. Chiefs and elders have organized the maintenance of "public" roads, and mediated between labor and management in industrial disputes. He cites these examples to show that the general populace is not apathetic and immobilized. However, his example gives as much credit to voluntary associations as to alternative hierarchical models which were still intact and operating throughout the years of both colonialism and independence.⁵⁸ Whether African "representatives," such as chiefs, kings, and Queen Mothers, have been chosen or elected in such a manner as to fit Wamba-dia-Wamba or Arendt's paradigms of not just representative, but actual participatory democracy, is a complex issue better

explored in a separate work. Let it suffice for now to note that Kwame Gyekye, speaking of the Akan chieftaincy, grants it some democratic features, while suggesting that some aspects of traditional rulership "are disharmonious with the modern situation."⁵⁹

What about Museveni's recent attempts to create non-party democracy in Uganda? Oloka-Onyango explains that instead of party politics, Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) hoped to build a broad-based government of national unity. Political party activity was suspended, supposedly to prevent the resurgence of sectarianism. Grassroots resistance committees were created to replace the parties. However, Oloka-Onyango complains that the resistance committees have usurped and abused judicial powers. More to the point, he complains that the involvement of the masses in the machinery of government has remained marginal.⁶⁰ Under external pressure for a party system, parties were allowed, but for the 1994 Constituent Assembly elections and the 1996 presidential poll, elections were held on a non-party basis and candidates had to stand independently. Still, one wonders if the "No change" slogan which got Museveni re-elected recently could be any further from Arendt's espousal of "natality" as the ability to do something new. Certainly, election observers noted that the fear of a reign of terror, still a vivid memory for most Ugandans, played a role in the popularity of the "no change" ideology.⁶¹ Although multiparties may be a problem, perhaps heads of state aren't the ones to declare by fiat that there

will be no parties, only participatory democracy. Doesn't the movement have to come from the people?

Conclusion

While Wamba-dia-Wamba believes that the State is dying in Africa, he does not see multiparty democracy as the solution. Rather, one must reconstruct the State from the point of view of emancipative politics.⁶² He insists that, first, there must be politics outside the parties. Both the former one-party governments and their present multiparty forms must go. He charges that "Multi-single vanguard partyism- proposed by former Party-State countries... that deny the existence of politics outside the parties, is only an extended authoritarianism."⁶³ Indeed, even in current newly-formed multiparty states like Kenya, not all political parties are registered, and political activity outside of registered parties is prohibited. As a concession to practicality, he admits that multiparty government is worth fighting for as it is an important stage toward emancipative politics. But the only practical purpose of multiparty government is to ensure a free space in which genuine political action in the form of people's movements could begin to express itself. The danger of being involved in multiparty struggles is the complacency and misguided notions of thinking one has reached democracy as soon as parties are allowed.

Wamba-dia-Wamba recognizes that his rejection of Party and State goes against the grain. Political philosophy as a whole, he states, citing A. Skillen, is "based on theorizing the

justification of the idea that there must be some dominating others for society to achieve its natural grounding.

Fundamentally a celebration of the State per se."⁶⁴ Wamba-dia-Wamba should therefore rejoice that he has not been alone in denouncing such a conception. Arendt's works have championed the council system for decades. Of course, Wamba-dia-Wamba adds an invaluable dimension by pointing out the African precursors and examples of council as a form of non-oppressive government.

He also helps by drawing our attention to the need to look at such models in the contemporary African context. He would also, undoubtedly, want to take Arendt to task, as other Marxists did, for her rigid separation between political and economic matters.

Indeed, the people do want bread. But Arendt would be consoled by his insistence that the African people do not want only bread, but also and importantly, political practice and self-determination.

Although several scholars have been prompted to reply specifically to Wamba-dia-Wamba's challenging ideas, none seems to have captured the heart of his criticism. Julius Ihonvbere, stating that he disagrees with Wamba-dia-Wamba, may have missed the latter's point. Ihonvbere argues that Wamba-dia-Wamba should not be so pessimistic about the party system; that just because some parties have been corrupt and money-grabbing, that is no reason to give up on parties. In fact, he suggests that the future of Africa needs good political parties, democratically formed with capable leadership. Ideally, multiple parties serve as checks and balances on each other

while serving "as outlets for the expression of different political interests and ideologies." Since he doesn't advance any ideas of how parties would avoid bolstering the State, which Wamba-dia-Wamba says should be radically altered, Ihonvbere gives the impression of slighting the profundity of Wamba-dia-Wamba's analysis. However, Ihonvbere does express his pessimism regarding "the masses," suggesting that they often support corrupt politicians and themselves aspire to ill-gotten wealth, since their work ethic has been destroyed.⁶⁵ Here he seems to allude to a "vicious circle" in which citizens, no longer assured that corruption can be stamped out, console themselves with the thought that they may be able to position themselves to soon take advantage of such corruption. However, his concentration on the vicious circle makes Ihonvbere's stance on parties a "pragmatic, take-reality-as-it-is" approach which counts more on well-meaning elites than easily duped citizens. Has this "realistic" vision sold the people short?

Indeed, Arendt claims that representation is no check against corruption, since the electorate can't be trusted to vote corruption out of office.⁶⁶ Interestingly enough, Ihonvbere uses evidence like this to support cynicism about people's movements, rather than about people as voters. Arendt, while cautioning about the dangers of "mass movements" like Fascism and Nazism (where people think alike so much, it becomes proof they aren't thinking at all), maintains her belief and optimism that the people can think and act, thereby being able to form and participate in their own government. As Leah Bradshaw

explains, Arendt wanted to believe that the apparent rarity of thought in "the masses" was contingent, due to the decline of the public realm and cloistered professionalism.⁶⁷

Another commentator, partly supportive of Wamba-dia-Wamba's criticisms of the importation of Western notions of democracy, nevertheless takes him to task for proposing a non-State or anti-State solution. Marie Pauline Eboh argues that while it may be true that colonial powers arbitrarily grouped peoples together into states, to propose a non-state solution would plunge Africa into countless wars of independence in which the result might be each ethnic group in Africa constituting its own country.⁶⁸ This argument also seems to misunderstand Wamba-dia-Wamba's criticisms, for to have independent states which received their identity and legitimacy from a homogeneous culture within its boundaries is indeed still an example of the nation-state on European political models which he rejects. However, Eboh does conclude by sharing a sentiment that would readily be embraced by Wamba-dia-Wamba, when she asserts: "The fact that no country has yet acquired true democracy, argues in favor of intercultural fecundation of democracy. Maybe in integrating the good aspects of the democratic processes of every society, the world may yet evolve a better brand of democracy."⁶⁹

Wamba-dia-Wamba and Arendt's ideal, as such, may seem impracticable. With all the world's political and economic forces behind multiparty democracy, it is perhaps quixotic to imagine Africa will resist and forge its own, truer, politics,

leaving other countries far behind, stuck in an "adolescent stage" of repressive representative politics. However, impractical as it may be, it is important on the theoretical level to clarify how far our present reality is from the ideal of politics. And, if a people's movement along the lines suggested by Arendt and Wamba-dia-Wamba were to emerge, their ideas would help us recognize its worth and support it, rather than squelching it in favor of a party structure. As Arendt notes, the reason the United States so soon diverged from treasuring political action, as found in its town halls, was that it hadn't realized the preciousness of its treasure. It easily traded in public happiness, based on political participation, for private happiness, based on personal acquisition unhindered by politics. The latter may be all that some leaders of opposition parties want, but Wamba-dia-Wamba thinks the African people want more; perhaps by reinvigorating their traditions of palaver and mbongi, they will get it, and become a role model for the rest of us.

NOTES

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