This book set out to make a critical inventory of African political thought at the close of the twentieth century. Until this point I have made a 'long march' through history providing interpretations of historical political theorists (chapters III, IV, V) and 'sieving out' the key models of thought (chapter VI). In this way, I have forged the necessary historical insight as well as the analytical tools for my inventory.

The inventory concerns the contemporary intellectual situation, particularly African political discourses in the 1990s. Before engaging in critical discussions, however, I have to gain an understanding of the relevant discourses. This forces me to return to the role of the hermeneutic before assuming that of the critic. The argument in this chapter thus proceeds in several steps: after understanding the political context (VII.1) and reconstructing the key political discourses in the 1990s (VII.2), I propose a diagnosis of the contemporary intellectual situation (VII.3). The closing chapter can complete the stocktaking by providing a critical assessment of standard and alternative intellectual options today.

The context of African political thought in the 1990s

African political thought changed radically from the late 1980s onwards. The idea of socialism, the key political idea for thirty years, suddenly disappeared from the intellectual stage. In 1987, the Zambian intellectual Henry Meebelo could still publish a book with the title *Zambian Humanism and Scientific Socialism* in order to achieve "greater ideological clarification and a higher revolutionary consciousness among the working people of Zambia." Only a few years later both key terms in the book title, as well as the urge for 'ideological clarification' itself, had lost political meaning. There were new beacons on the political horizon such as democracy, social movements and civil society.

Several factors contributed to this ideological shift. In the first place, the end of the Cold War was a crucial factor. Perceived from the South, the societies of the socialist block had appeared as a real alternative road to modernity. This alternative had now evaporated. The changed aid-policies of the World Bank and other Western donors were another factor. The international institutions introduced new political conditionalities in terms of

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439 Meebelo 1987, p. 7
440 Africa had its own experiences with 'Marxism-Leninism'. The Ethiopian famine of 1984 and the savage war against Eritreans constituted tragic landmarks. In 1981, the book *Afrocommunism* by David and Marina Ottaway could close with: "Afrocommunism is still in its infancy...Marxism-Leninism is spreading on the continent and is likely to continue doing so" (Ottaway 1981, p. 213). In the 1986 second edition this expectation was clearly tuned down.
ending single party rule and fostering 'good governance'.

Factors internal to Africa were not less important. There was a sense of complete failure of paradigms in development theory, of development policies and of the idea of the developmental state. A major positive inspiration for change was the successful National Conference in Benin, in early 1990, declaring itself sovereign and initiating democratic reforms. National conferences took place elsewhere in francophone Africa as well and civil opposition developed in many places. In Arusha in 1990 "The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation" was signed: "The burgeoning of the informal sector, the flourishing of voluntary associations, and the emergence of new economic, social, and intellectual elites combined to apply multiple pressures on African governments and alter the political calculus in most parts of the continent."

The new political situation changed the idea of who can speak on behalf of Africa. African presidents lost ground to opposition leaders, social movements and human rights activists on the one hand, and to the world of donor agencies on the other. The discourse of the donor world tended to become agenda-setting even for African intellectuals.

As the speaker changed so did the words. Single-partyism rapidly lost credit, civil rights were reaffirmed and, more generally, the dominant role of the state in political, economic and cultural life was criticized. The ideological shift created the curious situation of establishment institutions, such as the World Bank, speaking of 'grass roots' and 'democratization' and scarcely revolutionary charity organisations, such as the Foster Parents Plan, speaking of 'empowerment', while the vocabulary of social movements became enriched with notions such as 'human rights', 'citizenship' and even 'market freedom'. Disparate discourses started to conflate. The new wind of change affected intellectuals of all types. We can speak here of a 'democratic turn' in African political thought as democracy became the central issue in all traditions of thought.


The belief in liberation through building progressive post-colonial states, expressed in the Bandung conference (Senghor 1964, p. 9?), was lost. The Ugandan intellectual Mahmood Mamdani called the mid-nineteen eighties "the moment of exhaustion of the anti-colonial national project" (Mamdani 1995, p. 33). Saul (1986, p. 326) spoke of "the decomposition of "independence ideology"". See also (Amin 1994, p. 12). Carter & O'Meara 1986 gives some sense of the depressed atmosphere in the 1980s.

Chazan 1992, p. 281

A generation of leaders disappeared in the 1980s. Their public image came into disrepute. Significantly, as the new president of Uganda in the early 1992 Museveni spoke out loudly on behalf of Africa, but in the form of a heavy critique of African leaders! Privatization, Structural Adjustment Programmes and large-scale involvement of donors further reduced their power. (see e.g. Doornbos 1990, p. 56)

Important conferences take place in the context of the donor and international community, and research institutions are funded from Aid money. Multi-partyism and Governance are main topics, since even those who hold a different view of democratization have to participate and refer to these notions.
The 'democratic turn' and the idea of civil society

Richard Sklar's presidential address to the African Studies Association in 1983 announced a revival of the concern for democracy. Sklar opposed the common view that rapid development requires some form of 'developmental dictatorship' and defended, instead, the need for 'developmental democracy'. Constitutional government would be required involving effective checks and balances and multi-party systems. In the subsequent decade, 'multi-partyism' became the dominant shorthand for 'democracy' in publications of international organisations as well as in most scientific literature on the issue of 'democracy in Africa'.

Among African intellectuals, the renewed interest in democracy initially took the form of a critique of the single party system. Its undemocratic record was lifted as well as its claim to conform to African culture. The African critics were, however, far from optimistic because many considered the alternative of multi-partyism to be problematic. It was pointed out that most African countries did in fact have multi-party systems after independence so that it would be hard to believe that salvation would come from reintroducing such systems. A number of other objections to multi-party systems were brought up, such as the danger of enhancing 'tribalism', the need for national unity and the power of elite interests to subvert multi-party systems. Leftist theorists considered liberal democracy to be the political expression of capitalism and thus to be unattractive. A common position in the ideological dead-lock in the second half of the 1980s was to accept the idea of a political plurality while stressing the need for a form appropriate to the particularly African circumstances and cultures.

The rising pressure for democratic reform in many African countries in the early 1990s turned the discourse of African intellectuals wholeheartedly towards the issue of democratization. Meanwhile, the discussion expanded beyond the question of the political system per se to that of a democratic civil society. It was argued that the life-blood of democratic state institutions is provided by a multitude of civic associations constituting civil society. Civil associations can be interest groups such as trade unions and student organizations as well as other social actors such as the press, civil rights

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446 On the idea of developmental dictatorship see Gregor 1967 and 1980.
447 Criticizing the single party system was the completion of the critique of African Socialism in the previous twenty years. After its socialist and developmental pretensions now its democratic claims were refuted. See e.g. Oyugi & Gitonga 1987, Meyns & Nabudere 1988 (resulting from a conference in 1986) and Mwakayembe 1990.
448 Mwakayembe 1990, Ake 1992
449 "Participation of political and social forces in society becomes a crucial element in the democratic process. To grasp this dimension of political change in Africa, 'civil society' has to come to the fore again as a useful analytical concept" (Peter Meyns quoted in Buitenhuys 1995, p. 112).
groups, churches and religious movements, political, ethnic and cultural associations.

Halfway through the 1990s a further move away from a state-centrist position can be observed when the idea of the state itself becomes contested. In some cases the question was raised whether the current notions of politics and the state (and related political strategies) are outdated. It was argued that under some conditions more local or again more regional or Pan-African 'units of accountability' may serve democratization better. 450

The shifts in African political thought during the 1990s correspond with global intellectual developments. A first example is the academic debate about Africa. While the central position of the state was not yet called into question in the 1970s and 1980s (such as in the Dar-es-Salaam debates about the post-colonial African state in the 1970s, or in the debate about the 'uncaptured peasantry' in the 1980s), the processes of incorporation and disengagement of state and society became a topical issue in the second half of the 1980s. 451 The state itself became conceived as part of a complex process that acquired different roles at different times. In the 1990s especially, social organization 'beyond the state' came into focus. 452 The French Africanist Francois Bayart contributed greatly to the general shift in interest from 'high politics' to 'low politics' as well as to the introduction of the idea of civil society in the academic debate about Africa. 453

A second global development was the emergence of the idea of civil society. Initially 'civil society' captured the political imagination of a number of Eastern European opposition intellectuals and from the late 1980s in many parts of the globe. The concept of 'civil society' had been part of the main body of history of European political thought obtaining a number of different meanings. 454 In the influential Hegelian-Marxist tradition, for instance, civil society was equated with social life under capitalism. 455 In the revival of the concept in the 1990s, however, civil society embodied an attempt at defining a new political vocabulary beyond the divide between liberal and socialist traditions. Unlike the Marxist paradigm, class is not considered here to be the


452 e.g. Doornbos 1990, Bratton 1989


455 Several African marxists followed this use. Amin, for instance, uses 'civil society' and 'economic life' under capitalism interchangeably. Also (Hunt 1986).
conditioning factor of civil society; there are many movements and none is licenced as 'the subject of revolution'. In a similar vein, social movements are viewed primarily from a functional and political point of view as forms of self-organization or as intermediaries between state and society rather than as actors in a socio-economic power struggle. The idea of civil society expresses "a program that seeks to represent the values and interests of social autonomy in face of both the modern state and the capitalist economy, without falling into a new traditionalism."\textsuperscript{456} The notion of civil society, then, refers to 1) a realm of self-regulation of modern societies which can not be replaced by state action; 2) a realm which is essential for the legitimation and sustainability of the modern state; 3) a realm depending upon the state for its preconditions in terms of the rule of law and protected liberties.

**Democracy Discourses**

"The Rules of the Game"

The 'democratic turn' of African political thought presents itself, \textit{prima facie}, as the rise of a discourse on liberal democracy. On a range of issues, such as human rights, citizenship, separation of powers (legislative, executive, judiciary), the right to free political association (often confused with 'multi-partyism') and freedom of the press, liberal positions are agenda-setting. Also those who hold different views cannot avoid these issues and find themselves in a position where they have to provide arguments for their deviation from the liberal standard.

Some consider the emergence of a liberal vocabulary in Africa as simply a mimic of the West and a deviation from African thought rather than its newest form.\textsuperscript{457} Such an accusation has its own problems, however. Why would Africans develop liberal democratic lines of thought only by imitating Europeans and not through their own force of mind? There is no valid reason to assume that African thinkers are intrinsically 'un-liberal' and can only develop liberal ideas through mimicry nor that liberalism is intrinsically 'unafrican'.\textsuperscript{458}

\textsuperscript{456}Quote from Cohen & Arato 1992, p. 30; Exemplary uses of the concept of civil society serving a radical democratization discourse can be found in Latin America. Fernando Calderon, for instance, aimed at strengthening social actors to support democratization as well as (!) strengthen the state itself. "L'état sera fort mais seulement si la société l'est aussi" (Calderon 1990). Typically for this new use of the concept of civil society, the objective is not formulated in the notions belonging to classical emancipation theory ("smashing of the state" or "establishment of a new gestion sociale"), but in plural terms with a post-modern ring, such as "la production des nouveaux projects historiques" or "des nouveaux chaînes émancipatoires".

\textsuperscript{457}e.g. Wamba-dia-Wamba 1991 and 1992; Ramose 1992.

\textsuperscript{458}Note that the accusation itself has roots in the colonial image of Africans, namely that African thinkers do not develop ideas through their own force of mind but through some foreign influence only. The commonplace equations of liberalism with 'the West', or with
The liberal orientation in African political thought during the 1990s can, therefore, not be brushed aside. It should be studied. The dominant strand of liberal democratic thought today stresses the need for a 'multi-party system'. The question of democracy is, in this view, a question of political institutions; democracy is a well-established political system already functioning in the West and intended to be implemented in Africa. The symbol of democracy is the ballot box. Discussions on 'democracy in Africa' in this tradition mainly concern the issue of implementation and result in a rich harvest of studies informing the reader about which countries have turned towards democracy, which are in the process of doing so and which lag behind. The conditions and 'hope' for its successful implantation are contemplated. Frequently used metaphors depict democracy as something that has to 'grow', 'take root', 'come to full flowering' and 'bear fruit'. The idea of democracy itself is considered universal and thus not a main focus of discussion. When implementation fails, therefore, the blame is automatically not placed on 'democracy' but on the conditions, the people or their culture.

A number of African intellectuals, today as well as in history, do not limit the scope of the discussion on democracy to 'multi-partyism'. From Horton via Azikiwe and Busia to contemporary authors such as Sithole, Gitonga, Moyo and Ibrahim, the concept of democracy was not interpreted as referring to a single set of institutions but to the more fundamental idea that in Africa, as anywhere else, modern plural societies can be managed best in a polity involving a system of rights and sophisticated institutions of representation.

The core idea of liberal politics is epitomized by the metaphor of "the rules of the game". This metaphor returns in many of the key passages of the authors previously mentioned, appearing in statements such as "to play the game by the rules" and "politics is a competitive game." The cover of the book Democratic Theory and Practice in Africa, edited by W.O. Oyugi and A. Gitonga, shows a huge dice that is used as a ballot box. The 'game' represents here the institutionalized method of dealing with differences in views and interests. It suggests two levels: playing the game and the rules of the game. Disagreements within the game on social, economic or cultural issues do not endanger the game itself. The liberal idea of democracy, just like that of a game, defines a set of rules that permits a coordinated action among people of diverse background and opinion. In this way, by defining a political game

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459 'capitalism', are rather too facile. Similarly, unless the existence of some unliberal African essence could be assumed (and there is no way to validate statements about such essences), there is no contradiction in being a liberal African intellectual. See also Busia 1967, p. 91-110 on the views of African leaders.

460 e.g. Sklar 1987, Roonen 1986, Oyugi & Gitongo 1987. The discourse on 'multi-partyism' has been especially prevalent in documents of international agencies and international NGO's.

beyond the level of particular views, interests and identities, liberal democracy has a **universalist** claim.\(^{461}\)

The metaphor of the game illustrates another aspect of the liberal idea of democracy as well, namely that democracy is not about everything. There are various 'games'. Interactions in the economic market or in the courts of law follow sets of rules different from that of politics. The private sphere sets its own rules and should be largely fenced off from the reach of politics. In the liberal idea democratic rule must always be **limited** in scope.\(^{462}\) A system of rights is essential for both the definition of the political game and the limitations of its scope. Liberal conceptions of democracy have to reconcile the idea of participation with that of rights.

**Palaver Democracy**

The revival of a liberal democratic discourse can characterise only part of 'the democratic turn' in African political thought. A number of contemporary democratic theorists in fact reject liberal democracy arguing that the liberal idea of politics is both unattractive and contradicts African culture. They argue that if the turn towards democracy is to be more than an elite affair then it has to be rooted in the culture of the people. African traditions involve a rich heritage of democratic culture. Rejecting 'Western' liberal democracy, therefore, is not rejecting democracy as such but rather enriching it with African values and institutional forms which lead to a substantial involvement of the population in public deliberation. "We must...move away from the process of moving away from traditional society," as Wamba-dia-Wamba stated.\(^{463}\)

A number of African theorists take such a 'neo-traditionalist' stance. Their positions range from general philosophical expositions on the African idea of politics (such as in texts of Anyanwu, Ntumba, Okolo, Momoh and Ramose) to arguments on specific cultures and institutions (such as by Ayittee, Gyekye and Wiredu). Neo-traditionalists tend to create a contrast between a 'Western' multi-party democracy and an African democracy. The first involves 'adversarial' politics and the power struggle of majority rule whereas the

\(^{461}\)This universalism can involve a *normative claim*. Afrifa Gitongo perceives "a core objective meaning and substance which are at the root of its quasi-universal appeal". Democracy embodies "the great epic of mankind's movement towards civilized political behaviour" expressing values such as equality, liberty, human dignity, and openness to criticism (Gitonga 1987, p. 6 and 2). For the Zimbabwean Masipula Sithole the universalist claim of democracy is more down to earth: "Democracy's universal character is that those who exercise political authority in society do so with the explicit consent and genuine mandate expressed at regular intervals by the governed through an open, free and fair electoral process." (Himmelstrand 1994, 152)

\(^{462}\)Turok 1990, p. 109 states the opposite view: "Democracy is a concept of society and is about how its resources are used and distributed."

\(^{463}\)Wamba dia Wamba 1992, p. 32
African idea of community politics involves everybody and aims at consensus. A democracy of fractionist battles in contrasted with one where "the elders sit under the big trees, and talk until they agree."[464]

In most cases, a 'neo-traditionalist' position is based on the idea of an African identity or a shared African culture. To be an 'African', one argues, involves more than geographical origin or skin colour: it constitutes a particular way of 'being-in-the-world'. One can speak, therefore, of "the African personality" and "the African precisely as an African," as the Nigerian philosopher Chukwudum B. Okolo elucidates.[465]

The idea of an African identity invariably leads to an affirmation of the 'communal' character of African society and consensus as the basis of its politics. Communalism is then understood as "that the group constitutes the main focus of the lives of the individual members of that group"[466] or, in Mogobe Ramose's holistic formulation, a society "guided by the traditional principles of oneness, consensus and openness."[467] The nature of African societies, if not the nature of 'the African', thus makes the failure of the 'Western' idea of democracy in an African context unavoidable. It "will remain misguided and unsuccessful precisely because it will be unauthentic."[468]

The Palaver is often used as exemplar for this 'African' view of democracy. Palavering or deliberation aimed at reconciling all views is seen as the essence of the political process in the African community gathering such as the Kgotla, Ujamaa or Mbongi. The participants in the palaver are not equals, since there are status differences between king (chief), councillors and ordinary people as well as between men and women, old and young. Nevertheless, everybody can speak out and is listened to attentively. In that sense the palaver goes beyond mere formal representation. It ensures that all views are actually included in the deliberation process, thus realizing a substantial representation of citizens (which, in Kwasi Wiredu's striking formulation, is "On the Ashanti view,...a matter of a fundamental human right").[469]

The palaver solution to the question of representation is quite different from the liberal one. Liberalism requires an agreement of citizens on the procedures of democracy thus indirectly legitimating decisions, even for those citizens who do not agree with a particular decision. The palaver idea of democracy, on the other hand, aims at consensus about the decision itself.

Liberal democracy was described earlier as "limited" (not interfering, as far as possible, in the private sphere, in religious matters etcetera) and "universalist" (in its claim to define the political game beyond the level of

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[464] e.g. Gyekye 1988
[466] Gyekye 1987, p. 208
[467] Ramose 1992, p. 80
[468] Ramose 1992, p. 63. See also the discussion of Kofi Baako in chapter V; and Ramose 1992, p. 75. See Ball 1989 on similar discussions about politics in 19th century Europe.
particular views, interests and identities). The Palaver idea of democracy is its opposite: a broad view of democracy that concerns in principle every question relevant to the community, and a particularist view, specific to Africa.\textsuperscript{470}

The particularly 'African' character of the palaver alternative can be interpreted in different ways. For those who consider the African identity to have deep roots and to represent an authentic way of 'being-in-the-world' the choice of a political system is one for or against authenticity; it has a moral dimension. For a number of other authors, however, the particularism of African variants of democracy is a matter of historical contingency. They vindicate democratic forms developed in African societies simply because such forms are more democratic and better understood by the majority of ordinary Africans thus increasing political participation. In section VII.3 the specific political consequences of both the first (the 'culturalist') and the second (the 'non-culturalist') variants of the discourse on palaver democracy will be discussed.

\textsuperscript{470}Some neo-traditionalist views do not share this particularism. Wiredu (1997, p. 311) claims that "there is nothing peculiarly African about the idea itself".
Popular Struggles for Democracy

The 'democratic turn' involves a revival of liberal democratic thought and, for another family of theorists, a reorientation towards indigenous traditions of consensus democracy. The turn entails even more, however. For instance, how to interpret a statement like "it is the power of the people, unleashed by broad-based movements of a popular alliance type, that can restore democracy" that can "smash the neo-colonial state and erect a popular democratic state instead"? The idea of democracy expressed here is clearly not concerned with reestablishing palaver-democracy or with clarifying the rules of the democratic game.

The 'democratic turn' of the tradition of revolutionary anti-imperialism (the 'radical' tradition) consisted of a gradual shift within the last ten years from a vocabulary around terms such as modes of production, class and socialism to one around the new masterterm democracy. Democracy is discussed here using notions such as popular forces, popular struggles, social movements and popular accountability.

A first variant of the democratic turn in the radical tradition is represented by the famous political economist Samir Amin. Amin's work in the field of political economy, focusing on the issue of global dependency relations and the strategy of 'delinking', was later supplemented by work on such issues as ideology and democracy. His book Eurocentrism, for instance, provides a comprehensive historicist conception of society and culture. It identifies liberalism as the ideology and political system of the capitalist 'centres' and dictatorial regimes as the political form of dependent capitalism in the periphery. Overcoming authoritarianism in the periphery, therefore, must automatically involve overcoming dependent capitalism. True democracy is in this theory firmly linked to the idea of socialism (or at least to a 'non-capitalist social formation').

The shift of Amin's position in the democratic turn is hardly a radical one. The word socialism is avoided but his rather complete theory of the world system precludes a major change of position. If the economic order conditions the political and ideological order and if the economic order is basically that of global capitalism then there is not much reason to believe in democratization without overthrowing the global capitalist system (or breaking out of it by 'delinking'). Amin's notions largely duplicate the classical Marxist equivalents. The democratic struggle concerns a new 'social formation' (=socialism) and has to rely on 'national popular movements' (=masses). Relevant 'popular

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471 Anyang 'Nyong'o 1987, p. 15 and 24
473 Amin 1994. In Amin 1989, translated in Himmelstrand 1994: "the building of true socialism...cannot be realized at present. Instead we still have on the agenda what I have called a national popular revolution."(p. 332) The "national popular alternative...this transition period, which will be a long transition, a historical phase, in which we have to combine internal social changes with the capacity to master external relations"(p.334).
movements' are anti-imperialist and share a universalistic and not a parochial, fundamentalist, tribal or religious ethic (=the working class as the universal 'subject of revolution').

As distinct from the classical position of Samir Amin, one of the focal points of radical discourse today is CODESRIA (The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa).\(^{474}\) I will use here the position paper for the CODESRIA research network on social movements (the so-called *Green Book* of 1988) and the volume testifying the state of the discussions after one decade (the massive *African Studies in Social Movements and Democracy* of 1995) to map the development within main-stream radical discourse.\(^{475}\)

The turn towards democracy from the mid-1980s onwards, presents itself here as a self-conscious break with the 'statist', top-down paradigm of radical nationalist and developmentalist thought.\(^{476}\) It wants to "move from a state to a social logic," turning attention to the "subjective factor" and to the "actual forms of organisation and participation, democratic or otherwise, that have actually emerged in the historical development of popular movements in Africa." What should be done is "appraising movements that set out to change Africa."\(^{477}\)

An example of this approach is Mamdani's discussion of the development of nationalism in Uganda from the 1940s.\(^{478}\) Mamdani shows the constant opposition between state-nationalism and a popular, social nationalism of diverse social movements. A "rich spectrum of social movements organized in response to a variety of demands - not only national but also social"\(^{479}\) in the 1940s became subverted by private bourgeois interests due to shrewd colonial

\(^{474}\)The continental research network, titled "Social Movements, Social Transformation and the Struggle for Democracy in Africa" was initiated in 1985. CODESRIA publishes books and two house journals *Afrique Developpement* and the *Codesria Bulletin*. As a coordinating continental organization Codesria is closely related to other centres of discussion such as SAPES (Harare) and the Institute of Basic Research (Kampala).

\(^{475}\)Mamdani, Wamba-dia-Wamba, Mkandawire 1988 and Mamdani & Wamba-dia-Wamba 1995. Other important works include Anyang 'Nyong'o 1987, resulting from discussions of African scholars on *Popular Alliances and the State in Africa* in the framework of the United Nations University's African Regional Perspectives Programme, in Cairo in 1985. Also the *Review of African Political Economy*.

\(^{476}\)Dependency and Modes of Production schools suffered a "depoliticisation of their analysis" by their restriction to the "objective side of reality". This was reflected in the prominence of geographical and mechanical metaphors like 'centre', 'periphery', and 'delinking'. "(T)he concerns uppermost in the political agenda...were national, not social" (Mamdani & Wamba dia Wamba 1995, p. 2). "In the absence of organised popular movements of which they may act as organic intellectuals, African intellectuals - even radical ones - tend to be unable to express the demands of the large masses of people" (Mamdani 1988, p. 8).

\(^{477}\)Quotes Mamdani 1995, p. 16 and p. 3. Religious, ethnic, women or youth movements have been investigated by Africanists but, the authors of the *Green Book* claim, with a heavily modernist bias.

\(^{478}\)Mamdani 1990c

\(^{479}\)Mamdani 1990c, p. 54-55
reforms in the 1950s and later due to policies of the 'independent' state. Social nationalism thus became state nationalism and bottom-up nationalism became top-down nationalism. In this process the 'national' and 'modern' became opposed to the 'regional/tribal' and the 'traditional', and the diversity of popular forms of self-assertion became perceived as a threat to national unity.

The new radical discourse on democracy of the late 1980s presents itself as "inventory", "stock-taking" and as "an analytical study, a critical summing up of the positive and negative aspects of these movements." The discourse implies a definite political programme, however, which can be summarized as follows. The state which is dominated by neo-colonial conditions is unable to do its job nor to change by itself. Popular forces, therefore, have a role in enforcing a 'democratic, social transformation' and 'appropriate development programmes': "It is the contenting social forces, interested in the implementation of such programmes which, after a successful political battle over the control of state power, will use this power to see such programmes through." This, if successful, involves "to smash the neo-colonial state and erect a popular democratic state instead." The key to this "popular democratic revolution" is social power: "it is the impatience of left forces to get to positions of political power, rather than first build social power among the people, which remains a plague of revolutionary or potentially revolutionary movements in Africa." The thrust of the new radical discourse is the empowerment of popular movements.

The seminal phrase 'popular struggles for democracy' epitomizes the model of the new radical democratic thought. The 'popular' character expresses the idea of broad-based participation as essential for true democracy. This participation, however, is not achieved by simply establishing a range of democratic institutions in the way the liberal democrats hope to implement democracy. In real life, democratization involves 'struggle', that is an antagonistic set-up where enemies are confronted.

Mamdani's Ugandan example follows this popular struggles model. It stages basically two kinds of actors: popular forces versus the state (dominated by the 'property-aspiring middle class') or the democratic versus the anti-democratic forces. The struggle between these two sides constitutes the main story line. For the democratic side the aim is to transform state and society according to its democratic and social demands. The other side attempts to stop democratization or at least to limit it to the political system, leaving the social question untouched.

Surprisingly, the turn within African radical discourse from a statist to a social perspective in the late 1980s did not change its ground-plan. We still

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480 Mamdani, Wamba-dia-Wamba, Mkandawire (eds.) 1988, p.16
481 Quotes from Anyang 'Nyong'o, P. (ed.) 1987, p. 16, 24, 25, and 24 respectively. Also Mamdani 1990, p. 63 on smashing the state machinery.
482 Mamdani 1990a, p. 68
483 The shift may, in fact, be from one to the other of the two versions of Marxism identified by
have all the fundamentals of the classical Marxist paradigm, namely a theory of
history, a theory of class (popular versus elite, oppressed versus oppressor), the
idea of a 'subject of revolutionary change' (popular forces and social
movements) and the terminal station in the form of peoples power.  

Taking the 1995 CODESRIA volume *African Studies in Social Movements and
Democracy* as a guide, however, the change in radical discourse around the
mid-1990s affected indeed the theoretical ground-plan. Instead of a more or
less clear project of popular struggles for a popular democratic state the
radicals today tend to identify a variety of social forces, movements, social
groups and autonomous activities with contradictory tendencies and a variety
of experiences: "neither social forces nor social movements can be presumed to
have an internal consistency and coherence, or to be the agent of realizing a
trans-historical agenda."  The 1995 volume, edited by M. Mamdani and E.
Wamba-dia-Wamba, retains the issue of struggling for popular empowerment
and accountable government but the framework of a Marxist inspired theory of
history ('socialism') and of class (indicating the social forces that particularly
'count' in the struggle) has evaporated.

Significantly, the drift away from the classical radical framework
facilitates the elaboration of interesting positions and studies. *African Studies in
Social Movements and Democracy* provides a wide range of analyses of
movements and political experiences bearing on salient theoretical issues, such
as the idea of civil society, the notion of social movements and party politics.
The dominant 'liberal' idea of civil society, for instance, is criticized for its
exclusive focus on "groups which seek to control the state or seek effective
citizenship within the state system."  It is pointed out that a number of social
movements, such as indigenous women's groups, tend to be state-avoiding,
namely orientated towards increasing autonomy rather than towards increased
participation. They are not, however, for this reason irrelevant for democratic
struggles. Along a similar line, today's radicals changed their negative view of
ethnic and religious movements. If initiative from 'below' is taken seriously
then these forms of self-organization can be valued positively. "I don't know a
single peasant struggle for emancipation, on this continent, that was not at the
same time either ethnic or religious," Mahmood Mamdani states in a discussion
with Samir Amin.

The shift in radical discourse around the mid-1990s also provides more

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484 In fact, Mamdani used the words 'social' and 'democratic' often interchangeably (Mamdani 1990c, p. 58 and 60).

485 Mamdani 1995, 9-10, also 32

486 Mamdani 1995, p. 5. See also the quite massive critique in Mamdani's "A Glimpse at African
Studies: Made in the USA" (Mamdani 1990b). Both critiques are directed at what he calls
"the discourse of 'civil society'". Mamdani asks: "is not the discourse of 'civil society' a
restatement of an earlier perspective, that of 'modernization' theory, with its notion of the
'traditional' as the problem and the 'modern' as the solution?" (Mamdani 1995, p. 4)

487 Mamdani 1994b
room for discussing democratic institutions. Mamdani notes, for instance, that "social movements in Africa are not just about opposing the state, but also about redefining the form of that state." Every successful movement has to shift "away from a demonisation of the state to an articulation, both of how state power should be organised and how it should relate to social forces."488

In summary, the 'democratic turn' in the radical tradition consists of a gradual shift: first stretching a Marxist theoretical framework and then drifting away from it. As regards the idea of democracy, however, one basic motivation is maintained, namely the refusal to limit the issue of democracy to the political sphere alone: "democracy is a concept of society and is about how its resources are used and distributed."489

Three democratic turns, three democracy discourses

What first appeared to be a single reorientation of African political thought towards a discourse on democracy, turned out to be a multiple event instead. There are three democratic turns and three discourses on democracy. At this point, making use of the archaeological study of African political thought in the previous chapters, I want to obtain a more precise understanding of these discourses in order to proceed to their critical evaluation in the next chapter.

An archaeological view of the three discourses on democracy is somewhat disenchanting at first sight. Perceived from the broad historical perspective which the previous chapters provide, it can be seen that contemporary democracy discourses largely replicate models of thought that have dominated African political thought in the last 150 years.

The first case of main-stream liberal democracy discourse reproduces the modernization model of thought which was outlined in chapter VI. When modelled upon the idea of 'the rules of the game', democracy is conceived as the standard political requirement of universal modernization. The modernization model suggests that the management of any modern society requires a modern state as well as the basic institutions of a liberal polity to handle social plurality and to check state power. For modernizing African societies, with their plurality of interest, ethnic and religious groups, liberal democracy appears to be a universal requirement.

The second case of the discourse of palaver democracy (with notable exceptions discussed below) reproduces the basic patterns of the identity model of thought. Democratization, in this conception, is the full realization of African consensus politics in contemporary situations. Finally, the discourse on

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488 Quotes from Mamdani 1995, p. 34 and p. 33. This point, as well as the discussion of the state in radical discourse, is mentioned in the introduction of the 1995 book as the only point where the agenda of the Green Book has been adjusted today. My claim is that much more fundamental differences exist between the 1988 and 1995 versions of radical discourse.

489 Turok 1990, p. 109
popular struggles for democracy reproduces the basic pattern of the *liberation model* of thought. Democracy is conceived here as a phase in a history of social struggle which should ultimately lead to the radical empowerment of the oppressed and the realization of a completely new social order.

Incidentally, although the democracy discourses replicate classical differences, they still involve a certain rapprochement. Within all three discourses today the importance of issues such as *accountability, human rights, pluralism and need for participation* is recognized. Protagonists of popular struggles, for instance, do not deny that democratic institutions are important, while multi-partyists tend to recognize the importance of popular empowerment, and supporters of palaver democracy (in most cases) do not deny the need for a formal system of rights.

Shared convictions, however, do not imply shared discourses. Even when discourses do not deny each other's agendas, the *reinterpretation* and *valuation* of each of these agenda elements may differ fundamentally. Let me represent these differences in a table which highlights characteristic distinctions without reducing discourses to caricatural stereotypes. My claim is that the three democracy discourses can be charted with the triangular diagrams of models of thought presented in chapter VI. The triangle indicates that, despite their shared concern for 'democracy', actual conceptions are conditioned by the specific basic assumptions of each discourse. The discourse covers a range of issues but the way in which these are conceived is determined by the specific basic concern and polarity which is indicated at the top of the triangular diagram.

**Liberal discourse on democracy**  
Primary: democracy is interpreted as an aspect of political **DEVELOPMENT** towards a 'modern' polity  
Secondary: this democracy is considered to express an African **identity** because those participating are Africans and because the general idea of democracy is adjusted to suit African conditions;  
this democracy is considered to be **liberating** because it is the antidote to any kind of authoritarianism

**Palaver discourse on democracy**  
Primary: democracy is interpreted as the expression of political/cultural **IDENTITY**  
Secondary: this democracy is considered to imply **development** because it involves 'true' development from African roots;  
this democracy is considered to be **liberating** because it involves 'true' liberation of African potential
**Popular Struggles discourse on democracy**

Primary: democracy is interpreted as an aspect of social struggle and **Liberation**

Secondary: this democracy is considered to be **African** because it is democracy for all Africans; this democracy is considered to be **developmental** because it serves true development for all.

At first sight, the intellectual spectre seems to abound with combinations and intermediate forms of these species of discourse so that my typology of models does not appear very helpful. Mamdani (liberation model) and Biko (identity model), for instance, share a concern for African liberation and both could, therefore, be considered 'liberationists'. I propose, however, a different approach because a careful examination shows that they were, in fact, talking about quite different things. Mamdani discusses a process of **socio-economic emancipation** which overcomes, finally, the basic social distortions deriving from global capitalism. Biko, however, discusses a process of **cultural-political liberation of black Africans** conceived of according to a world-view marked by the colour line. Mamdani follows the logic of what I termed the liberation model and Biko follows the identity model. Similarly, both Busia and Azikiwe defended the need for liberal democratic institutions. For Azikiwe, however, this concerned universal requirements of modernity whereas for Busia democratic institutions would have to be tailor-made arrangements for a particular society, closely connected to the indigenous political institutions while overcoming their limitations. Azikiwe followed the logic of my modernization model, while Busia followed a variant of the identity model.

My claim for fundamental differences between models also implies that I expect mixtures or additions of these models to remain eclectic combinations that can hardly result in a coherent argument.\(^{490}\) The logic of the three models suggests that their combination must result in conceptual ambiguity. Key concepts will then be used in two or more meanings in one argument, following the conditioning of their meaning by different models.

My claim that arguments which I allocate to different models do not mix can be illustrated by Basil Davidson's remarkable discussion in *The Black Man's Burden*. In particular his first chapters make an effort to show that the nation-state is a foreign import. Africa has its own alternatives that are indigenous and democratic. The struggle for Africa is therefore to reaffirm its own political identity. Democracy is conceptualized here within an intellectual framework that opposes **indigenous** and **alien** political forms. In Davidson's argument, however, this conceptualization has to compete with the notion of democratization as an anti-elite and anti-imperialist struggle. In this second idea, democracy is marked by mass action and the empowerment of the poor. Both lines of argument, while often leading to parallel conclusions, remain remarkably separate (chapters 1, 2 and 3 follow the first line, chapters 8, 9 and the conclusion follow the second line). When it comes, finally, to the question of "what should be done," Davidson is a classical radical democrat demanding the empowerment of the masses. The 'indigenous', which was so prominent in

\(^{490}\) Of course new models of thought may be possible (see also my last chapter).
the first chapters, does not save Africa, but rather the 'popular' in the form of
the empowered 'masses'. One can combine what I called an 'identity' and a
'liberation' model of thought but the resulting argument remains eclectic:
paying lip-service to one discourse while finally reconfirming another and
using key concepts in different meanings.

My charting of discourses through the triangular models has the
advantage over the simple comparison of ideas in that it is like identifying
species through a DNA test. It is a way to map fundamental differences
between discourses while seeing through superficial similarities. It shows that
once the thinking about democracy gets trapped in one of the established trails
of thought it tends to follow an identical line of argument. Avoiding these
established trails of thought would require avoiding its underlying models.

491 See my "Cursing the Nation-State" Transition, 61, p. 114-122.