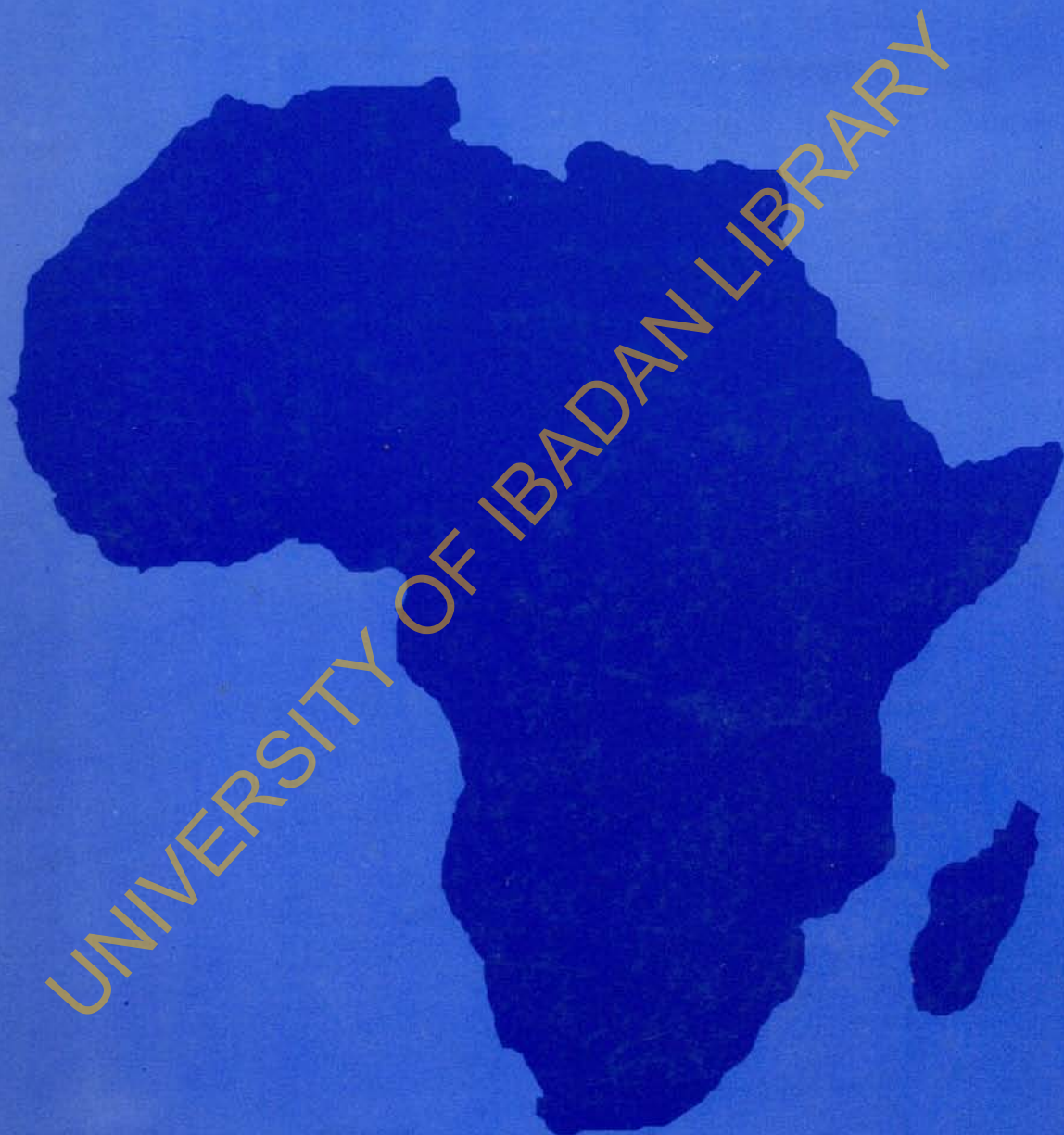


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# BORROWED INSTITUTIONS AND AFRICAN EXCEPTIONALISM: A CRITIQUE

Dr. E. Remi Aiyede

## ABSTRACT

*This paper critiques the view that attributes the crisis of the state and governance in Africa to the contradiction between African values and indigenous processes of governance, and borrowed institutions. It argues that engaging political institutions in a detailed comparative manner shows how and why similar institutions borrowed from the West have worked in some developing countries and have been less than successful in others. An engagement with institutional theory from the perspective of Africa should aim to bring African experience to bear on issues rather than merely to show how unworkable they are in Africa.*

## Introduction

It is common to attribute the crisis of the state and governance in Africa to borrowed institutions. The central argument is that such institutions are contradictory to African values and indigenous processes of governance. This perspective is found not only in the literature on development studies, and the crisis of the state that gripped the continent from the late 1970s onwards, it has also resurfaced in the more recent pre-occupation with democratic transition on the continent.

In the early post independence period, efforts were made to define the ideas of an African personality, an African socialism and African idea of leadership. Many of these concepts were pioneered by politician intellectuals. This was part of the nationalist strategy of decolonisation.

The crisis of development in 1980s spurred the robust literature on the failure of capitalist development in Africa. Some scholars have referred to the economy of affection as dominating the African continent and preventing the widespread of contract relations that is appropriate to capitalism as explaining the limited achievement in capitalist development. It is argued that the African continent is nothing but an expansive network of informal relationships and affective ties hinged on kinship ideology. People are far from being atomistic or individualistic, but are glued together as a community (Sandbrook 1985, Hyden 1983, 1990).

In the literature on democratic transition, not a few have called for the evolution of an African brand of democracy. For them, the democracy model that the continent has been saddled with is alien to the history and political culture of Africans. More recently there is a talk of an African version of citizenship (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2004).

Thus, there is a persistent view that the alien character of political institutions is largely responsible for the pathologies of the African state. Writers have lamented the superimposition of a political structure (multiparty system, parliamentary/presidential system of government, periodic elections, and related artefacts of liberal democracy) onto a political culture that has no intrinsic relationship to the structure. The impact of the discontinuity between civil society and political society (such that many emerging political parties have no relationship whatsoever with the people); and the seeming diminishing space for civil society in a neoliberal democracy that is almost an empty shell vis-à-vis the political is linked to the same contradiction (Amuwo 2008:6). What is emerging is a gradual claim of African "exceptionalism". Indeed, on contrary reasons, some scholars have on the strength of African "exceptionalism" argued that the pathologies of today are a reflection of Africa's pre-colonial past. But underlining this claim is a measure of frustration arising from the failure of institutions of governance in economic and political spheres. This is put in bold relief by Engel and Olsen (2007) who argue in their edited book, *The African Exception* that -

*---in many respects Sub-Saharan Africa is an exception to the general pattern of "development" in the south. Whereas many countries both in Asia and Latin America have achieved some progress in economic growth and in the institutionalisation of democracy, Africa's path to the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a different one....governance is too normatively loaded, it is too tied to western notions of politics and as a consequence, it is too detached from the way politics and economics in Africa works(p.2)... governance lacked "explanatory power when it comes to Africa (p.5)*

This paper argues that the claim of "exceptionalism" needs to be anchored on a detailed comparative study of institutional transfer and adaptation. This will enable the transcendence of comparative studies' focus on classification and labelling instead of investigating the ways and means of appropriating institutions and how these affect outcomes.

Furthermore, this approach will enable us appreciate institutional innovations that have occurred in Africa and how these can be furthered for the development of the continent. It argues that institutional borrowing and adaptation are not peculiar to Africa. There is a need to engage political institutions in a detailed comparative manner, in order to show why similar institutions which have been borrowed from the west have worked in some developing countries and have been less than successful in others. Against this back drop, this paper examines parliamentarianism, presidentialism and affirmative action in Nigeria, Brazil and Malaysia, paying attention to institutional content and operation. These countries have recorded various levels of political stability in spite of similar political institutions. Rather than focus on cultural differences (culture is not static), it examines the ways and means of adaptation of these institutions as explanatory variables. There are usually nuanced variations in the way institutions are adapted and operated. Presidentialism in Nigeria, for instance, although borrowed from the US has marked differences from presidentialism in the US and elsewhere.

### **Theoretical Issues**

Early studies of politics and development in post-colonial societies, or new states as they were then called were very optimistic about the direction and possibilities of development in those countries. The dominant paradigm at that time viewed progress as modernisation. It viewed the post-colonial states as evolving in unidirectional and teleological way to become like the advanced western democracies. Modernisation was presented as multi-dimensional, involving a trend towards competitive democracy, stability and integration by means of institutional rationalisation and differentiation. Later on, this view was reversed in the light of criticisms, experience and competing paradigms, especially dependency and other Marxist influenced models. Political development in the reformulation of this institutionalist approach to politics was conceived as reversible; hence the need to deal with the problem of political decay came to be emphasised.

The entrance of the dependency school fundamentally underscored the untenability of a linear conception of development. Indeed, modernisation school and the dependency school came to focus on change and the difference in development paths across time and space. The emphasis was the interaction between cultural traditions and the forces of modernisation which often lead to varying development outcomes. Eventually, both traditions began to focus on the state as the locus of political analysis. Thus, the culturalist's assumption that political life is grounded in the realm of ideas and values and the structuralist's idea that economic conditions determine political life meshed in a general focus on the state only to be supplanted by a focus on politics and its associated outcomes. This approach is represented by the new political economy with its emphasis on rational actors, the primacy of individual self-interest, and its bias against "predatory state", politics and rent-seeking behaviour. One important aspect of the new political economy is its attempt to resolve puzzles related to cross national variations in economic policy and performance, especially key puzzles over cross-regional differences in development patterns between the East Asian states relative to African and Latin American nations.

The studies attempted to explain the disparities in economic performance of states that were in similar conditions in the 1960s over time. These studies have over the years drawn on neo-Marxist, rational choice and pluralist understanding of institutional forces such as class conflict and the organisation of economic interests, the legality of public institutions to give substance to public interests, the self interest of politicians, policy currents and in relation to the cohesion, autonomy, administrative capacity and societal linkages of state actors, political institutions within and outside the state sector. The focus is on the complex interplay of preferences, and policy outcomes.

Institutions have emerged as important sets of explanatory variables. But the concept of institutions have been defined largely by conceptualisation of causes and consequences of political change in terms of phenomena that were defined at the national level, whereas globalisation and its associated process has narrowed the scope of the state by privatisation and deregulation. Societal interests and actors have become more active in an array of activities, the resurgence of civil society and rapid institutional change. Rapid institutional change is not only the consequences of power relations in context of globalisation; it is a reflection of the rapid (sometimes instantaneous) diffusion of information, ideas and influence across vast territories. More than that, it reflects the more ready access to ideas, experiences and alternatives from which lessons can be learnt and choices made. Thus, the focus on institutional change must take into account the diffusion, interaction and adaptation of institutions to various contexts across the globe. An approach to the study of development that places premium on learning, institutional choice and adaptation across countries must involve a focus on the basis and causes of institutional change in order to appreciate the nature, specificity of challenges and differing outcomes of similar institutions across countries (see Remmer 1997).

The important point arising from these studies of institutions is the effort to derive a set of institutional characteristics that account for success and failures across countries. Nowhere is this most evident than in the discourse on developmental state. Successful countries' features are distilled as elements that account for success while the features of unsuccessful ones are distilled as accounting for their failure. Then follows the attempt to explain why unsuccessful countries were not able to develop the characteristics that would lead to success. This approach is sometimes not helpful as it assumes a sharp divide between successful states and unsuccessful ones. Besides, it does not reflect the dynamics of the development experience, especially trial and error. This point is emphasised by Nkandwire (2001:290-291)

*As formulated, the definition of the "developmental state" runs the risk of being tautological since evidence that the state is developmental is often drawn deductively from the performance of the economy. This produces a definition of a state as developmental if the economy is developing, and equates economic success to state strength while measuring the latter by the presumed outcomes of its policies. It has led to myopic concentration of analysis around success to the neglect of the "trial and error" nature of policy-making even in the most successful cases.*

With regard to Africa, two strands of the argument can be distilled. The first emphasises the consequences of institutions received from colonial rule, which are alien and arbitrary and therefore implicated in post-colonial crisis of state and development. Modern institutions in Africa emerged as the foundations of colonial rule and are therefore not designed to achieve development. Such legacies of colonialism are more attuned to exploitation and control, it is often argued. Davidson, for instance argues that the "curse of the nation" in Africa is the disregard for cultural community, the disregard for ethnic group which led to the disregard of Africa's real traditions in drawing state boundaries. These state boundaries cut across ethnic boundaries and are therefore not natural. Hence the series of violent conflicts and instability that arise out of the failure to achieve integration and accommodation among the diverse ethnicities that constitutes states in Africa. As Mamdani(2001:653) has objected, all boundaries are artificial and shifting power relations often translate into shifting boundaries and war and conquest have been integral to state-building.



A more nuanced analysis emphasises the interaction between the colonial structure and Africa responses and the resultant amorality of the civic public as responsible for the crisis of legitimacy and institutional failures in Africa. This perspective emphasise structure with little regard for agency and how to change the situation. It more or less present the colonial experience as fundamentally structuring post-colonial politics and its attendant pathologies (Ekeh 1975, Osaghae 2008).

On the other hand, another set of analytical perspective, which has been quite dominant, emphasis the agency of post colonial leadership but reach out to pre-colonial Africa's cultural repositories for an explanation of the pathologies of politics or the failures of institutions where their existence is admitted. The most fundamental expression of this perspective is neo-patrimonial theory. Institutions are not significant in politics because they are either patrimonialised (Callghy 1984) or informalised (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Neo-patrimonialism in dealing with the weakness of the post colonial state by returning agency to postcolonial politics draw on what is perceived as pre-colonial legacies of rule. In general, it assumes that postcolonial institutions did not upturn pre-colonial norms and practices, such as patronage, tribute, kinship and other relationships. Rather Africa's post colonial leaders have been able to subvert institutions by clientelism, use of state resources for political legitimation and personal rule. These methods and strategies of organising political power have been carried over from pre-colonial forms of rule. Indeed, Etonga-Manguelle (2000) thinks that at the heart of the problem of Africa is weak capacity to manage uncertainty as a result of the effects of traditional religion in the mindset of the average African. This effect is manifested in the resort to religion rather than technology and jurisprudence in the management of uncertainty. African society has little orientation towards change, limited concern for the future and characterised by a general submission to a ubiquitous and implacable divine will.

A positive engagement with politics upholds a dynamic view of society and culture whether in Africa or elsewhere. It calls for a detailed understanding of the foundations of the colonial rule and how elements of its foundations have been unwittingly translated into postcolonial institutions, thereby leading to crisis. A representative of this approach is Mamood mamdani who has provided a detailed description of the character of colonial rule, and how the divisions and discriminations created to support decentralised despotism has been reincarnated in the re-division of "yesterday's natives into postcolonial settlers and post-colonial natives". Mamdani (2001) argues that a geological fossil conception of custom "has been key to identifying, buttressing, and salvaging a domestic authoritarianism as an authentic tradition." I argue that this same idea of authentic tradition underlies the claim that borrowed institutions that are alien to Africa account for the failures of development in the continent. Once it is realised that colonialism was not confined to Africa, and that some post-colonial states within and outside the continent have been able to achieve and sustain improved living conditions, industrialise and maintain political stability, the claim of an African exceptionalism becomes superfluous.

What should be admitted is not the impossibility of development because of the fundamental contradictions between African custom or traditions (or resilient pre-colonial structures) and borrowed institutions. It is the fact of crisis, failures of institutions (similar borrowed institutions that have succeeded elsewhere) and snail-pace progress in many countries that should be admitted. This implies that we must critically revisit what we have done with the borrowed institutions and their consequences. A good way to do this is to explore and compare the appropriations of specific institutions across countries. These can be done in several ways. One way is to identify similar institutions in selected countries in Africa and explore their appropriation processes and the outcomes of those institutions. Studies like this should inform the African Peer Review Mechanism which seeks to assess performance of governments by identifying successful practices and innovations in the continent for diffusion. As we have learnt from the series of studies on state building in Europe innovation, imitation and collaboration in the design of institutions among states over several years of conflicts and crisis led to the emergence of the modern state (Halden 2010). Another way is to study how a particular institution has fared in selected African and non-African states. There is a lot to learn from the newly industrialised economies of East Asia and Latin America in terms of the institutional

adaptation, adjustment and practices that may sustain and strengthen institutions given the relative proximity in time of development in those countries to the ongoing efforts in Africa's states.

The possibilities of such engagement are underscored by the fact that the process of political institutionalisation in Africa recorded remarkable advancement in many states since the 1990s. It is this reality that has made the relative neglect of institutions in the study of African politics visible enough to be acknowledged; hence, the need to bring institutions back in (Orvis, 2006). In the words of Posner and Young (2007:126, 138) "The formal rules of the game are beginning to matter in ways that they previously have not.... African politics needs to be viewed through a lens that recognises the formal constraints on executives and rejects the assumption that African leaders simply get what they want". Similarly, Bratton (2007) argues that neither the "stable, valued and recurrent patterns of political behaviour" nor the patterns of patron-client relations, nor their interactions are understood as they exist in Africa. This is the case because there is no clear agreement among scholars about the effects of informal institutions. While some emphasise their effects in integration, others argue that they impede development. Formal and informal institutions interpenetrate one another. There is a need for comparative and historical approach to the study of institutions in Africa in order to overcome the stifling claim of African exceptionalism that has promoted labelling at the expense of effective engagement with empirical theories from the perspective of the African experience. The next section will illustrate the justification for this approach.

### **Comparative Reflection on Institutional development and Adaptation in Nigeria, Malaysia and Brazil**

Nigeria gained independence in 1960. At that time it was touted to hold the potential of becoming one of Africa's most prosperous federations. It adopted the British parliamentary system of government with the Queen as the ceremonial President. In 1963, it became a republic and replaced the queen with the Nigerian nationalist, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe whose name was written into the constitution. Nnamdi Azikiwe was the leader of one of the three dominant parties at independence, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The others were Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG). The problem with appointing a partisan leader as President came to a head during the 1964 election which was won by the NPC but boycotted by the NCNC and other members of its alliance. Dr Azikiwe refused to call Tafawa Balewa to form the government. The stand-off between the president and the prime minister created a constitutional crisis. As the two contenders openly court the support of the military, they raised consciousness of the military as final arbiter in determining the relative political strength of those offices, thereby providing the theoretical place of the military as the guardians of political power above the constitution (Dudley, 1973). As Osaghae (1998) noted the power struggle between the president and the prime minister over who would actually exercise executive power including control of the armed forces underlined the abandonment of the parliamentary system in 1976. Indeed, the crisis and violence that attended the 1964 elections in the western region, the relative size of the regions in terms of population and land mass, and the electoral system which underline the imbalance in size deepened distrust and rivalry that ultimately provoked the military coup of 1966 and the subsequent civil war.

During and after the war Nigeria effected a series of institutional changes that have increased the number of states and localities through territorial fragmentation. The modification of the first-past-the-post system requires political parties to reflect national spread in organisational structures and candidates to achieve a spread of votes across the country (25 % of 2/3 of states in the case of presidential election and of localities in the case of gubernatorial elections) in addition to winning majority of the votes cast in an election. Horowitz (2003: 118-119) observes that Nigeria pioneered this system that "require candidates to achieve a regional distribution of votes, in addition to a national plurality, that foster conciliatory behaviour where ethnic groups are regionally concentrated. Apart the introduction of affirmative action in the form of reverse discrimination and quota in appointments into political offices and admission into universities and unity schools, sitting of industries, and the building of roads, Nigeria has also adopted a zoning system for the rotation of public offices. These institutional engineering has been able to avert major conflagrations given the

divided nature of the country (Suberu 2010).

Unfortunately, the same positive remark cannot be made in terms of economic growth and development, an untoward situation given the enormous wealth potentials of the country. Nigeria has an elaborate framework for the distribution of oil revenue among the states of the federation with specific provision based on derivation. Because the arrangement is designed to ensure that access to resources by individual and segments of society without any particular meaningful national development and social value in place, the process has degenerated into an unhealthy competition for a share of the "national cake" without the necessary concern for national strength and progress. Indeed, in Nigeria, identity factors whether religion, language, and geography are mobilised in the struggle for access. These have defined the use and interpretation of federal institutions such as federal character principle (affirmative action) and rotation. The protracted economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s and adverse effects of the subsequent structural adjustment programme (SAP) have been attended by a rising tide of ethno-religious violence across the country's urban and rural areas resulting in significant destruction of lives and property, human rights violations by security forces and thousands of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Ethno-religious conflicts and other forms of communal conflicts pose a challenge to the viability of the current democratic process.

Malaysia achieved self-rule within the Commonwealth on August 1 1957. The federation of Malaysia became independent in 1963. At that time, it had 14 states. Singapore exited from Malaysia in 1965. The transformation of Malaysia into an industrial power occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, a period when Nigeria writhed under the pangs of SAP. Under the premiership of Mahattir bin Mohammad, the country moved from being an agriculture-based economy to an industrial power, making headway into computer and consumer electronics. Today it is one of the largest computer hard disk manufacturers in the world. The period also witnessed massive infrastructural development, including the now famous 'Twin Towers' built by Petronas, Malaysia's version of the Nigeria National Petroleum Development Corporation (NNPC). Malaysia consistently achieved 7% GDP growth along with low inflation in the 1980s and 1990s.

Although initial explanations of the successes of Malaysia and the other South East Asian Tigers emphasise the role of Asian values, including reform Islam, more recent analysis have tended to emphasis choice and adaptation of institutions and quality of leadership. At independence, Malaysia adopted the British parliamentary system like Nigeria did in the first republic. But unlike Nigeria which made a partisan individual the ceremonial head of state, Malaysia made the King of Malaysia the Head of State. The king of Malaysia is elected to a five-year term among the nine hereditary sultans of the Malay states. These rulers until recent constitutional amendments were the custodians of national culture and enjoyed the powers to declare a state of emergency. Thus, the King was a key devise of the system of checks and balances. In Nigeria, during the first republic each region had a unicameral legislature with an advisory council of chiefs (the councils were made up of traditional hereditary monarchs in the various communities in the region). The members of the council of chiefs were appointed by the regional governments and were subject to their control. They could be removed from office and if necessary exiled by the governor. They were therefore tools in the hand of the head of the regional government. This arrangement has persisted till this day leading to the politicisation of the institution of traditional rulership, their incorporation into patronage politics and thereby reduction in dignity and accountability role of those institutions.

Malaysia is a top exporter of oil and rubber. It is legendary that they came to Nigeria to take palm oil and made it a major generator of foreign exchange when Nigeria abandoned agricultural produce and became dependent solely on oil export. The national government in Malaysia collects oil royalties of which 5% are passed on to the states and the rest is retained by the Federal Government. In contradistinction with Nigeria, successive leaders have provided and popularise values that should underline the interpretation and use of affirmative action and other principles of political accommodation. In Malaysia, for instance, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad has always emphasised economic prosperity, Asian values and an East Asian model for development. His deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, went on to outline the broad elements of reformist Islam as a moral and ethic

supporter of modernisation. He popularised Islamic devices like *hisba* (mutual fairness), (tax or tithe on income, business, and property), *waaf* (endowment: charitable foundation), and the concept of the "virtuous man", the *insain salih*" and drew on the ethical images of Confucianism that emphasise, humaneness and the morally perfect being. He popularised a form of capitalism that places preference on wisdom and virtue over material riches (see Derichs 2002:46-47). This is in contrast with the situation in Nigeria where religion is politicised by the leadership and presented as an identity to be mobilised for political ends. Religion and ethnic identities have been used to promote difference and employed to advance the struggle for resources, especially political office (witness the Sharia issue) in Nigeria. The importance of the moral fabric of leadership is manifested in Nigeria in the 2007 and 2011 elections. In the first instance, a sitting president announced that the general elections were a "do or die affair" for his political party. In the second instance, another sitting president announced that elections would be free and fair, underlined by a "one man one vote" philosophy. He also consistently stated that he would accept defeat should he lost the election. This disposition did not only reflect in the choice of the leadership of the electoral empire but also in the character of the elections which were adjudged by both local and foreign observers and monitors as free and fair. Values inform the content of institutions, make markets more effective, act as insurance and risk-pooling mechanisms, reduce uncertainty and allow individuals to extend decisions to the future (Schleifer and Vishny 1998). Concerning the experience of the parliamentary system in Nigeria, it can be argued that the appointment of a partisan leader, Nnamdi Azikiwe, as the Head of State reflect the short-time calculations of the ruling coalition.

Nigeria and Malaysia have also adopted similar affirmative action programmes to address inequality. Affirmative action was adopted in Malaysia to restructure Malaysian society so that economic function and geographical location is not identified with race, or at least to reduce such identification to its barest minimum by means of rapid economic expansion. In 1970, the government introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) that sought to deal with racial imbalances between the Malays and non-Malays. The policy set a target that within a period of 20 years (1971-1990); Malays would own and manage at least 30% of the commercial and industrial activities of the economy. Malay Quotas were introduced for trading and business licenses and equity ownership. The government also provided special assistance through credit, training and business sites. It acquired shares in private corporations on behalf of the Bumiputera (Malays) with a view to achieving 30% corporate ownership. The Industrial Coordination Act (ICA) of 1975 provided the state with the means to implement equity policies. Massive programmes of preferences were introduced for the Malays in universities, government employment by the government.

These programmes were supported by a constitutional amendment to discourage opposition, the constitutional amendment made it seditious to question provisions in the constitution pertaining to the "special rights and privileges" to the Malays. All of these policies were part of a larger policy aimed at reducing and eventually eradicating poverty by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians. Then in 1991 the National Development Policy replaced the NEP. This new policy marked a retreat from state interventionism and a greater resort to policies shaped by market forces. Thus, emphasis moved from setting target for economic restructuring and income redistribution to emphasis on growth and income raising policies. Currently university admissions are now based strictly on academic qualifications because in the past few years the government felt that it was not getting as many engineers and high-tech people as the economy needs. This measures contrast with the Nigerian situation that had no targets and timelines. The critical lesson from the practice of affirmative action is that it should only be one dimension of a general programme designed to reduce or eliminate poverty. Affirmative action also needs to be depoliticised for it to achieve its set goals. Politicians must show leadership by not using it as a strategy of getting votes. It should not be used to replace established standards, to entrench mediocrity. Economic growth which is necessary for poverty reduction requires the establishment of a globally competitive economy. As such, a good affirmative action programme should not lead to widespread demoralisation; fall in productivity and inefficiency in service delivery (Sowell 2004).

Brazil presents particularly interesting lessons in terms of institutional learning. A Portuguese colony,

Brazil became independent in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. For several decades, it was not able to establish itself as strong viable state. Its fortune was always tied to the coffee trade and thereby subjected to the rising and waning conditions in the economy of its wealthy developed neighbours. It was its military involvement in the Second World War and the subsequent ideological emulation of the US that affected the direction of development in the country. The armed forces positioned itself as the veto over the direction of politics, setting the parameters within political power was exercised. When the military eventually took power in 1964, development was driven by an orientation that equated national security with orderly rule and rapid economic development. Maximising the output of the economy and minimising all sources of cleavage and disunity within the country became the defining value of rule. The legitimacy of the state and government was hinged on economic performance, rapid growth and industrialisation, as the military sought to depoliticise society (Kohli 2004, chapters 4&5). Since the return to democratic rule in 1985, Brazil has experimented with a series of institutions, including federalism, presidentialism, proportional representation, and so on. The prevalence of undisciplined parties, frequent executive –legislative gridlocks, political party switching, pork and rents caused the system to be described as suffering from “hyperactive paralysis syndrome”. But the success of Brazil in spite of these shortcomings has occasioned a revisiting and reinterpretation of the elements of Brazilian politics and institutions. Earlier interpretation of the Brazilian situation is now located within the question of whether the glass was half empty or in fact half full (Armijo et al 2006).

Brazil’s presidential system has been described as “Coalitional Presidentialism” (*Presidencialismo de Coalizao*) because it combines presidential government with extreme party fragmentation. A combination of presidentialism with multipartism was thought to be problematic for political stability and governmentality. But in Brazil coalition government has been explored and used by successive presidents to ensure political endurance of their regimes. The Brazilian model has become popular in Latin America (Malamud 2001:22-23). In this institutional environment, presidents have been able to manage economic crisis and conduct structural reforms. Many presidents in Latin America developed the capacity to formulate and enforce technical measures through planning and circumventing both public and legislative debate or achieved consensus where necessary by building coalitions in support of their policies (Malamud 2001:28). There is reason to believe that the evolution of the coalitional presidentialism is the product of political learning and trial and error (Power 2011:16).

### **Conclusion**

In contemporary Africa, after many years of theorising about the inefficacy of rules in politics, scholars are beginning to reckon with the salience of rules in political processes. This shows that the claim of the dominant theory of neo-patrimonialism that the distinctive element of politics in Africa, underlying its exceptionalism, is that rules play little or no roles in actually constraining leaders’ behaviour, describes only a moment or phase in the evolution of politics in Africa. The development of institutionalised politics like the experience in Brazil, although slow will intensify in Africa unravelling the capacity of the continent to meaningful borrow and adapt institutions from other countries whether from the north or south, west or east. The point is that neither pre-colonial African situation nor the colonial experience has over-determined the current state of politics and political organisation on the continent. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that absent colonialism, the pre-colonial political organisation would have evolved from what we know it to be. Thus, selecting elements of contemporary society that reflect some characteristics of pre-colonial Africa regardless of its accuracy to define or label contemporary politics is to redefine ‘underdevelopment’ as originally conceived by *dependencia* by standing it on its head.

Calos Lopes (1996) opines that Africa has always appropriated foreign ideas in its bid to achieve progress as in the pan-African nationalist movement in various spheres. These included the Africanisation of administration, economic nationalisation, the attempt to create and strengthen indigenous private sectors, religious enculturation. The fact is that these processes have recorded various levels of successes and achievements. Since the process involves trial and error, the emphasis should be to continue to review and re-examine progress and failures as the continent seek ways to respond to the needs of society in a creative and innovative manner.

A comparative reflection on institutional borrowing across African states and between African states and other parts of the developing world shows innovations and errors in the choice and adaptation as well as differing learning capacities across countries in the appropriation of modern institutions. Thus, institutional failures do not necessarily suggest a contradiction between African values and structures on the one hand and imported institutions and values on the other. What may be at issue is whether the required thought, innovation, learning, time and effort have been invested in the appropriation of modern institutions in order to ensure that they are attuned to the conditions, needs and challenges of Africa. Finally, a critical engagement with institutions in Africa should aim to bring African experience to bear on concepts and models of social organisation rather than to emphasise how such concepts or models do not relate to the realities of Africa. After all, Africa is a part of the unfolding of human history in a globalised world. This is not saying that Africa, like other continent, does not have its own peculiarities.

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