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L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
A África e os desafios do Século XXI
إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

**Africa's Triple Challenge in the 21st Century:
Democracy, Citizenship and Urbanisation**

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Abstract

There seems to be a curious historical parallel between how events and processes unfolded in the era of decolonisation and what later transpired in the early 90s when the continent was allegedly gripped by a democratisation fever that forced dictators and autocrats alike to conduct free and fair elections and reconnect with the electorate. If the struggle against colonial rule dubbed national liberation was anchored on a mythical revolution of rising expectations; the so-called struggle for second independence christened democratisation was designed by default to restore hope in the nation-state and enframe the proverbial market forces as the engine of growth and development that would guarantee democracy. Yet it soon transpired that the undue emphasis on the procedural aspect of democracy – periodic elections, institution building, governance capacity, civil and political freedom et al – sidelined the real stuff of politics as a lived quotidian experience for millions of Africans. It is therefore not surprising that both projects/moments began to unravel exactly two decades after they were installed. If military coups /dictatorships, mass rigging of elections, and the installation of presidents for life were the key indicators that heralded the collapse of the immediate post-independence dispensation; incessant communal strife, rag-tag rebel movements, a militant ideology of marginalisation from diverse social groups, the do or die battle between ‘settlers’ and ‘indigenes’, and the escapist design of governments of national unity constitute the major challenges in the contemporary struggle for democracy. How do we make sense of these daunting challenges in the context of globalisation and the mass movement of peoples? How democratic is a system of governance which excludes the majority of its citizenry – women, youth and the urban poor – from participating in the business of governance? What are the current and future implications for a democratic practice in Africa if citizens are denied the enjoyment of their basic rights to housing, education, health, and a living wage? Is there a place to situate the settler-indigene dialectic that is threatening to tear the continent apart within the discourse of democracy? What would it mean for democracy and social citizenship when 60% of Africans will live in cities, which is about twenty odd years away? By merging the multiple conversations around democratisation and citizenship this paper presents a nuanced and critical take on the major challenges confronting Africa in the 21st Century. The central problematic revolves around, and is anchored on, the pivotal notion of social citizenship as a lived experience. By so doing, we underline the shortcomings of democratisation as it was conceived then; as it is practiced today; and the need for an inclusive paradigm that would expand the democratic space by linking it with the new quest from below for social citizenship.