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African Refugee Students' Conceptions of Democracy: Implications for Conflict Mitigation

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Abstract

This paper analyzes conceptions of democracy among 52 refugee students, randomly assigned into four groups, studying in universities in East African, by identifying what they prioritized as its vital attributes. The students were requested to listed, by consensus, the five top attributes for democracy. A total of 13 attributes emerged with transparency and accountability, rule of law, respect for human rights and dignity, freedom of expression and association, equality before the law, participation in decision making, political stability, equitable distribution of resources, social justice and fairness and free and fair elections capping the top ten. It was concluded that the attributes mirrored the theoretical models of democracy, with those fitting the classical liberal and social democratic models of democracy holding sway. In addition, they manifested the respondents' suggestions, not only for the strengthening of democratic reforms but also, for combating conflict and refugeeism in Africa.

Introduction

Though dating back to the classical period, the word democracy does not have a commonly held definition. To illustrate, Unah (1993) defined democracy as a process through which political participation is guaranteed and maximized while Janda and Goldman (1995) viewed it as a system of government under which governing power is exercised by the people directly or indirectly through periodically elected representatives. For Lioba and Abdulahi (2005, as cited in Fayemi, 2009), democracy represents a system of government that allows citizen the freedom to decide their desires. On the other hand, Ogunsanwo (1994:139) saw democracy as “a whole series of processes and cultural values which relates to the selection of leaders at all levels of society, the behavior of groups and individuals vis-à-vis those who hold different views on issues under consideration as well as the use of power by those the selection process has placed in decision making position”. Whatever the definition, though, participation seems to be a central feature of democracy. Also, central to democracy is the idea that legitimate authority emanates from the people either directly or indirectly through some form of representation, the rule of law (or the absence of the arbitrary exercise of power) and a guaranteed removal of governments that do not serve the desired purpose (Oyekan, 2009).

Despite its elastic use, today democracy is the most preferred system of government worldwide (Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Oyekan, 2009). In Africa, the wave of democracy has been spreading across the continent since the early 1990s, buoyed by both internal and external factors (Fayemi, 2009). Internally, the demand for improved governance has played a major role in the rise of pro-democracy movements while externally the democratization process has been driven by the pressure for universal human rights, freedoms and dignity (Fayemi, 2009). In a 1999-2000 survey conducted by Bratton and Mattes (2001) aimed at establishing the level of support for democracy in developing countries, four of the five African countries sampled showed high levels of support for democracy as “preferable to any other form of government”. Specifically, in Botswana, which has a well established democratic tradition, 82% of the people supported democracy. In Nigeria 81% of the people showed similar support while in Zimbabwe and Ghana the levels of support for a democratic system of government stood at 71% and 76%,

respectively. A further survey conducted in 2008-2009 by Bratton (2010) revealed that an average of 70% of Africans interviewed in 20 countries supported democracy.

Research has shown that people can be willing to sacrifice a lot for the sake of democracy. To illustrate, Bratton and Mattes (2001) study focusing on political beliefs of the citizens in twelve African countries showed that, by merely having the idea of democracy and its benefits, the citizens of those countries were willing to endure a lot hardship such as poverty and marginalization meted out on them by their authoritarian governments so as to achieve democracy in their countries. However, despite people's commitment to democracy worldwide, there is evidence that most people's understanding of this concept deviates from the one held by experts in matters of government. For example, previous research has shown that students conceptions of democracy do not necessarily conform to the models that articulated by theorists (Cunningham 2002; Husfeldt, 2003). Further, Dalton, Shin and Jou (2007) have shown that even adult conception of democracy tends to be based on popular rather than theoretical conception.

In light of the above, this study was designed to gauge the conceptions of democracy among refugee students studying in universities in the East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. In particular, the study sought to understand the students' conception of democracy by identifying what they considered to be its top five essential attributes arrived at through consensus. By focusing on students' conception of democracy, the study wished to answer the following questions: 1) Do refugee students have a single conceptualization of democracy that satisfies all the conditions set by the various theoretical models of democracy? 2) What attributes of democracy are most important to refugee students and how are these colored by their status as refugees? 3) What are the implications of the definitions of democracy provided by the students for the resolution of conflict in Africa?

Focusing on refugee students is important because refugeeism is a deeply rooted problem in Africa that symbolizes the crisis of lack of functional democracy in the continent. Autocratic governments have been responsible for armed conflicts and civil strife, ethnic intolerance, poor governance, economic mismanagement, poverty, massive abuses of human rights, the monopolization of political and economic power and resistance to popular participation in

governance (Idowu, 1999; Salim, 1999; Bujra, 2002). This has resulted in refugee flows into neighboring and distant countries in search of peace and economic opportunities. Somalia provides a good illustrative case; the prolonged conflict that has engulfed the country for decades is responsible for the influx of Somali refugees to other African countries (especially Kenya and South Africa) and to Europe and North America.

Theoretical and Applied Conceptions of Democracy

The notion of democracy does not represent any specific cultural value or norm. Rather it is a meta-concept that acts as a link that meditates the interrelationship between diverse sets of political structures, paradigms and ideologies (Held, 2006). As a result of this, the definition of this concept is inconclusive and contentious (O'Donnell, 1994).

Overall, six major theoretical orientations about democracy have been identified - namely, the liberal democracy, republican democracy, realist (elitist) democracy, social democracy, participatory democracy and deliberative democracy (Coppedge and Gerring et al, 2011; Smit and Oosthuizen, 2011). Table 1 summarizes the distinctive features of each of the six models of democracy.

Table 1: Distinctive Features of Models of Democracy

Categories	Description/ Features
Liberal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• rights to individuals,• strict checks and balances procedures
Republican orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• separation of the powers• majority rule• holds leaders accountable• power concentrated in parties• unitary governments
Social democratic orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• promote equality no matter the diversity• equitable distribution of resources• provision of social welfare• intervention in the economy against market forces
Realist or elitist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• electoral democracy

democratic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• leadership that applies managerial principles• maximizing benefits and reducing the costs of administration• decision making by a small minority ruling elite• free and fair electoral process• guarantee citizenry their civil liberties• disregarding the rule of law
Participatory orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• sharing of power between various institutions• popular participation in decision making• distribution of executive powers to different institutions
Deliberative orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• generate a consensus about any decision that is to be made• process by which decision is reached is seen to be more important than the actual decision made• achieve the common good for all through public reasoning and not by way of coercion

In the past two decades, a number of empirical researches have delved into the question of how people understand the notion of democracy. A study commissioned by the 1990s International Association for Evaluation of Achievement in Education (IEA) in the 1990s to investigate the civic knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of young people in 28 countries found that both 14 year olds and upper secondary students considered, participation in voting was an important aspect of democracy and a key indicator of responsible adulthood. These early adolescents also consider participation in social movement, community activities and protection of the environment to be just as important democratic activities as voting (Torney-Purta et al, 2001; Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt and Nikolova, 2002).

Miller, Hesli and Reisinger (1997) conducted a survey with the aim of establishing the conception of democracy among the elite and non-elite in the Soviet Union and whether the people's understanding had an impact on their perceived support for democracy in Russia and Ukraine. Overall, the results showed that when the most prominent meanings of democracy as expressed by the mass and elite are compared, there appears to be considerable similarity in their conception of democracy. However, whereas the majority of the masses tend to associate democracy with increased freedom of

speech, majority of the elites associate it with improved observance of the rule of the law in the country (Miller et al, 1997).

Another study by the US National Centre for Education Statistics (2001) found that students aged 14 years ranked freedom of expression (90%) and voting and respect for government leaders (80%) as the two top essential attribute of democracy. Equality was also viewed as an essential attribute of democracy, especially among the Asian and black students. In addition, most of the ninth graders believed that in a democracy, the government must be responsible for promoting gender equality in political leadership, provision of healthcare for all, guaranteeing law and order within the country and facilitation of economic growth and development throughout the country (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2001).

Turning to the African context, a recent survey conducted by a Norwegian researcher Lisa Waldschmitt (2010) focusing on the conceptualization of the notion of democracy among secondary school students in Ilala district of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania revealed that free elections and freedom of expression emerged as the top most elements of democracy; these were identified by 95.1% and 92.8% of the interviewees, respectively. Other attributes of democracy enumerated by the students include giving help to youths (88.2%), citizens' right to make demands on the government (87.8%), support for women to join leadership positions (86.8%), free media (79.9%), the right to peacefully protest against social injustices (68.7%), the need for the media to avoid presenting conflicting reports of the same event (64.7%), the need to promote gender equality in the constitution (64.7%) and the need for people to participate in party politics (59.1%). Based on the study, it was concluded that Tanzanian students had a traditional conception of democracy that upholds values such as free elections and freedom of expression (Waldschmitt, 2010).

Reference could also be made of a study conducted by Carolyn Logan and Robert Mattes (2010) in 20 African countries between 2008 - 2009 which showed that Africans associated the term democracy first and foremost with the protection of rights and freedoms (civil liberties). In particular, based on popular perceptions, on the 0 to 4 scale freedom (2.9) emerged as the most widely enjoyed dimension of democratic quality. This was consistent with a wide range of findings based on Afrobarometer data collected during the 10 years preceding Logan and Mattes' (2010) study (Bratton, Mattes and

Gyimah-Boadi 2005), which showed that Africans associated the term democracy first and foremost with the protection of rights and freedoms (civil liberties). Other attributes of democracy provided by identified by the Logan and Mattes (2010) study included Horizontal Accountability (2.6), Rule of Law (2.6) and Competitiveness (2.5).

Implications of Democracy or Lack of It for Conflict Mitigation in Africa

That democracy is the best form of government is evident from its quest which has engulfed the globe since the 1990s. In Africa, where the prevalence of civil strife and conflict has been high, democracy has been associated with significant reductions in the onset and incidence of conflict (Elabadawi and Sambanis, 2000; Keefer, 2008; Schwarzmantel, 2010). Elabadawi and Sambanis (2000) argue that the best and fastest strategy to prevent and reduce the prevalence of conflict in Africa is to institute democratic reforms. According to them, tailored political governance, characterized by well-designed and inclusive political institutions and processes, is essential for the prevention and management of conflict. Similar sentiments are echoed by Siegel (2004), when he stresses that democracies have a higher propensity for conflict avoidance because a government based on rule of law and the respect for human rights has a stronger basis for resolving differences in non-violent, legal and morally defensible manner. Also, democratic leaders and their electorate are accustomed to balancing multiple and competing interests as well as accept the inevitability of disagreements and the need for non-violent compromise.

It is the specific attributes of democracy that can be associated with its capacity to reduce civil strife and conflict. To illustrate, one of the possible bases for violent conflict is human insecurity, which is normally associated with exclusion from and lack of access to resources and power (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2006). Where human security exists, people enjoy protection from grave threats to their lives, safety from harm and violent conflict. Democracy guarantees the protection of people through institutional safeguards, equality before the law and the advancement of human rights (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2006), thereby lowering the opportunity for conflict. To echo the International Institute for Democracy and

Electoral Assistance (2006), where well-designed and inclusive political institutions and processes exist, they function to prevent violence as well as to manage conflict constructively.

Similarly, the regular elections that characterize democratic governance not only ensure that governments are accountable but also that citizens do not have to use force to remove them from power. If the government does not serve the people (or become dysfunctional) it can be removed peacefully through the ballot box (Elabadawi and Sambanis, 2000). The opportunity for conflict is reduced further by the fact that citizens are more likely to abide and accept government actions, regardless of whether they agree or disagree with them, because they voted the government to power. Also associated with civil strife and conflict in Africa is ethnic rivalry, a factor that is made worse by poor governance/ the lack of democracy.

Conversely, autocratic governments are much more likely to fall into civil strife and internal conflicts (Salim, 1999; Bujra, 2002). Internal conflicts normally take two forms; politically driven or instigated conflicts (e.g. rebellions to overthrow governments, secessionist rebellions, Coup d'Etat) and conflicts between groups within the country (e.g., conflict over resources and ethnic-based violence). A consequence of civil strife and conflict is that it forces large numbers of people to seek refuge elsewhere either internally or externally.

In particular, the outcomes of the lack of democracy, such as poor governance, corruption and economic mismanagement, poverty, massive abuses of human rights, the monopolization of political and economic power, competition for resources, ethnic intolerance and resistance to popular participation in governance (Idowu, 1999; Salim, 1999; Bujra, 2002), precipitate or predispose a country toward civil strife and conflict. For example, in a non-democratic state increased competition for the control of the state for purposes of using the state and its institutions for accumulation of wealth is a recipe for civil strife and conflict. Similarly, economic mismanagement and corruption and inequality in the distribution of resources have been associated with a competition for economic resources that, in some instances, has resulted in conflict (Adedeji, 1999). Not to forget that the insecurity (i.e., the psychological fear of political uncertainty) associated with the lack of democracy may also precipitate conflict (Adedeji, 1999).

Methodological Underpinnings

The empirical data for this study were obtained from some 52 refugee students from Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan (prior to the breakaway of Southern Sudan) attending public and private universities in the East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The group incorporated both males and females aged between 18 and 24 years. They were studying science- and arts-based courses, such as medicine, engineering, information communication technology, social work and business studies at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The participants were given a two hour lecture on democracy in a training workshop, held at Kenyatta University (one of the public universities in Kenya), designed for refugee students attending various universities in East Africa under the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI). All the basic concepts and principles about democracy were introduced during the lecture by a visiting professor from Norway. The question was, "what is democracy about?" At the end of the lecture, data were collected from the participants to gauge their conceptualization of democracy. The exercise involved the self-completion of worksheets that required the participants to write down what they associated with the notion of democracy. The end product was a cognitive map of what the participants understood by the term democracy.

The data collection occurred in three phases. In phase one, each individual named and prioritized the attributes of democracy as follows: First, by entering in an eight circle concept map worksheet anything they associated with the notion of democracy. Second, by ranking the eight attributes listed in the concept map from the most to the least important. The aim was to ensure that each individual indicated what s/he considered the most vital for democracy to exist.

In the second phase of the data collection process, the participants were randomly assigned into groups of four (4) and requested to share their individual priorities about democracy with their group members. In all 13 groups were constituted. A brainstorming session took place during which each group agreed on the top five attributes of democracy. These were then written in a worksheet which had pictures of East Africa's big five wild animals namely, the lion, the elephant, the rhino, the buffalo and the leopard. The animals were

ranked in that sequence with lion being the number one attribute of democracy while the leopard represented the fifth vital attribute.

In the third phase of data collection, there were five flip charts pinned along the wall with the pictures of the big five wild animals organized in their ranks as explained above. All the groups were provided with five stickers for their big five attributes of democracy. Each group was required pin their top five attributes on the corresponding pictures on the flip chart. For every group, what they considered to be their number one attribute of democracy was pinned on the picture of the lion, number two attribute on the picture of the elephant and so on. The end product was a map of democracy showing what the participants prioritized as the vital elements of democracy.

Findings

The results of this study are summarized in Tables 2 and 3. Whereas Table 2 presents the distribution of top five attributes identified by the members of the 13 groups participating in this study ranked in order of importance, Table 3 provides the relative frequency distribution of those attributes by their rankings. As evident from tables, the respondents identified 13 characteristics as the top five vital attributes of democracy. Going by the number of times an attribute was identified regardless of its ranking it was accorded, the top four most mentioned attributes included transparency and accountability which was given by 84.6% of the groups, the rule of law/ constitutionalism (69.2%), respect for human rights and dignity (69.2%), and freedom of expression (speech) and association (61.5%). Other attributes capping the top ten list included equality before the law (46.2%), participation in decision making (46.2%), political stability/ law and order (23.1%), equitable distribution of resources (23.1%), social justice and fairness (23.1) and free and fair elections (23.1%).

Table 2: Distribution of Top Five Vital Attributes of Democracy by Groups

Group	Ranking Ordering of Top Five Attributes of Democracy				
	1	2	3	4	5
Group 1	Rule of law (constitutionalism)	Equality for all before the law	Freedom of expression and association	Free and fair elections	Transparency and accountability
Group 2	Freedom of expression (speech) and association	Equality for all before the law	Respect for human rights and dignity	Transparency and accountability	Social justice and fairness
Group 3	Equality for all before the law	Political stability/ law and order	Respect for human rights and dignity	Clear authority structure	Rule of law (constitutionalism)
Group 4	Equality for all before the law	Respect for human rights and dignity	Transparency and accountability	Free and fair elections	Freedom of expression and association
Group 5	Rule of law (Constitutionalism)	Freedom of expression and association	Equality for all before the law	Respect for human rights and dignity	Transparency and accountability
Group 6	Rule of law (constitutionalism)	Social Justice and fairness	Transparency and accountability	Respect of human rights/ human dignity	Participation in decision making
Group 7	Majority rule	Participation in decision making	Transparency and accountability	Clear authority structure	Political stability/ law and order
Group 8	Transparency and accountability	Rule of law (constitutionalism)	Respect for human rights and dignity	Participation in decision making	Equitable distribution of resources

Group 9	Rule of law (constitutionalism)	Clearly written and easily understood laws	Freedom of expression and association	Equitable distribution of resources	Political stability/ law and order
Group 10	Respect for human rights and dignity	Transparency and accountability	Freedom of expression and association	Equitable distribution of resources	Participation in decision making

Table 2 Continued

Group 11	Rule of law (constitutionalism)	Respect for human rights and dignity	Equality for all before the law	Freedom of expression and association	Transparency and accountability
Group 12	Rule of law (constitutionalism)	Free and fair elections	Participation in decision making	Social justice and fairness	Transparency and accountability
Group 13	Participation in decision making	Freedom of expression and association	Respect for human rights and dignity	Transparency and accountability	Independent judiciary

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Top Five Attributes of Democracy by Rankings

Attributes of Democracy	Ranking by Respondents										Total* ¹	
	First		Second		Third		Fourth		Fifth		No	%
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
1. Transparency and accountability	1	7.7	1	7.7	3	23.1	2	15.4	4	30.8	11	84.6
2. Rule of law (constitutionalism)	6	46.2	1	7.7	-	-	-	-	2	15.4	9	69.2
3. Respect for human rights and dignity	1	7.7	2	15.4	4	30.8	2	15.4	-	-	9	69.2
4. Freedom of expression and association	1	7.7	2	15.4	3	23.1	1	7.7	1	7.7	8	61.5
5. Equality before the law	2	15.4	2	15.4	2	15.4	-	-	-	-	6	46.2
6. Participation in decision making/delegation of power	1	7.7	1	7.7	1	7.7	1	7.7	2	15.4	6	46.2
7. Political stability/law and order	-	-	1	7.7	-	-	-	-	2	15.4	3	23.1
8. Equitable distribution of resources	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	15.4	1	7.7	3	23.1

*¹ N = 13, the total number of groups participation in the study. Since different attributes were mentioned more than once the percentages here do not total to 100.

9. Social Justice and fairness	-	-	1	7.7	-	-	1	7.7	1	7.7	3	23.1
10. Free and fair elections	-	-	1	7.7	-	-	2	15.4	-	-	3	23.1
11. Clear authority structure	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	15.4	-	-	2	15.4
12. Majority rule	1	7.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	7.7
13. Clearly written and easily understood laws	-	-	1	7.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	7.7
Total	13	100	13	100	13	100	13	100	13	100		

As evident from Table 3, of the 13 characteristics listed by the respondents, the rule of law was most frequently ranked as the top most attribute. It was ranked first by 46.2% of the groups followed by equality before the law at 15.4%. Other attributes ranking first included transparency and accountability (7.7%), respect for human rights and dignity (7.7%), freedom of expression and association (7.7%), participation in decision making/delegation of power (7.7%) and majority rule (7.7%). On the other hand, three attributes - namely, respect for human rights and dignity (15.4%), freedom of expression and association (15.4%) and equality before the law (15.4%) - featured prominently as second most important features of democracy. The attributes respect for human rights and dignity (30.8%), transparency and accountability (23.1%), freedom of expression and association (23.1%) and equality before the law (15.4%) emerged as the most frequently rated third characteristics of democracy. Similarly, the attributes most frequently ranked fourth included transparency and accountability, respect for human rights and dignity, equitable distribution of resources, free and fair elections and clear authority structure; each was ranked fourth in importance by 15.4% of the groups. Finally, the attributes most frequently ranked fifth as vital for democracy included transparency and accountability (30.8%), the rule

of law (15.4%), equitable distribution of resources (15.4%) and political stability (15.4%).

Discussion of Findings

From a theoretical point of view, the top five attributes advanced by the different groups of refugee students analyzed in this study as vital for democracy mirror all the models of democracy save the deliberative orientation (Coppedge and Gerring et al, 2011; Smit and Oosthuizen, 2011). Specifically, the rule of law/constitutionalism, respect for human rights and dignity, freedom of expression and association and law and order/ political stability, which emerged as the second, third, fourth and seventh most frequently listed attributes, are consistent with the liberal model of democracy. Whereas the attributes of transparency and accountability (the most frequently cited attribute) and majority rule fit the republican orientation, their counterparts of equality before the law, equitable distribution of resources and social justice (which were the fifth, eighth and ninth most frequently listed) are characteristic of the social democratic orientation to democracy.

The study revealed that those participating in this study prioritized attributes that fit the liberal and social democratic models of democracy. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted within the African context (see e.g., Bratton et al, 2005; Logan and Mattes, 2010; Waldschmitt 2010). Furthermore, that the respondents prioritized attributes that mirror the liberal and social democratic models of democracy is not surprising given their status as refugees. It can be argued that the major factors that push individuals to become refugees echo the absence and/or the violation of the tenets of liberal and social democracy. In particular, it is social, economic and political conflicts related to the absence of the rule of law, lack of respect for human rights and dignity, lack of freedom of expression and association and the absence of political stability coupled with the lack of equality before the law, the failure to distribute resources equitably and the absence of social justice that cause individuals to become refugees (UNHCR, 2010).

Based on the findings of this study, refugee students did not hold a single definition or conceptualization of democracy that satisfies all the conditions set by the various theoretical models of democracy. Rather, they presented different conceptions of democracy, most

probably depending on their social values and orientations. This is consistent with Dahl's (1989) view that some of the orientations seem to emphasize institutional aspects of leadership while others stress its procedural aspects. And just like one polity might score high on egalitarian aspects and low on the deliberative aspect while others score high on participatory aspects and low on electoral aspects, the conception of democracy by individuals and/or groups of individuals will most likely display similar trends. This is evident from the results of this study. As such, it makes much sense to view the attributes identified by this study as essential features of what constitutes democracy rather than attempt to pass judgment about which orientation (or model) of democracy is better than the other.

To reiterate, this study examined the conception democracy among a group (i.e. refugee students) that had emerged due to conflict consequent from the absence of functional democratic governance in African countries. As such, its results have important implications for the prevention and/ or reduction of conflict in the continent. It is our considered opinion that the students' views embody attributes that are essential for the attainment of more democratic governance in the African continent. Consistent with Elabadawi and Sambanis' (2000) position that democratic reforms offer the best and fastest strategy to prevent and reduce the prevalence of conflict in Africa, we consider it not farfetched to argue that the study offered suggestions not only for the strengthening of democratic reforms but also for combating conflict in Africa. Based on the ranking of attributes that are important for democracy to obtain, they called for a democracy that especially prioritized transparency and accountability, the rule of law, respect for human rights and dignity, freedom of expression and association, equality before the law, participation in decision making, political stability, equitable distribution of resources, social justice and fairness and free and fair elections, among others.

Furthermore, guided by the existing literature which suggests that democracy has a positive impact on conflict (e.g. Elabadawi and Samnanis, 2000; Keefer, 2008; Schwarzmantel, 2010), we posit that the attributes identified by the students constitute major building blocks in the prevention of conflict and, by implications, in the maintenance of peace. One may also add that the study, albeit implicitly, suggests that democracy, however defined, is necessary for refugeeism to be reduced. This is consistent with our conviction that the attributes

prioritized by the respondents were possibly influenced by their status as refugees and, thus, reflected the democratic ideals whose existence in home countries would persuade them to return home. In other words, the voices of those who participated in this study could be interpreted as decriing the absence of democracy in general and/or the lack of certain attributes of democracy in the home countries whose existence would make it conducive for them to return and remain at home. Such attributes have a very strong bearing on absence of conflict, which has been associated with forced migration into refugeeism (see Idowu, 1999; Salim, 1999; Bujra, 2002).

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, three conclusions can be drawn. First, that the five attributes advanced by the different groups of refugee students analyzed mirror all the key models of democracy save the deliberative orientation. However, the respondents gave precedence to attributes that fit the classical liberal and social democratic models of democracy. Second, that those studied did not share a single definition or conceptualization of democracy that satisfies all the conditions set by the various theoretical models. Third, and most significantly, it is apparent that for Africa countries to nurture peace and mitigate refugee-triggering conflicts there is the need to embrace models of democracy that pay special attention to liberal and social democratic ideals. In particular, they must embrace transparency and accountability, the rule of law, respect for human rights and dignity, freedom of expression and association, equality before the law, and inclusive participation in decision making.

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