

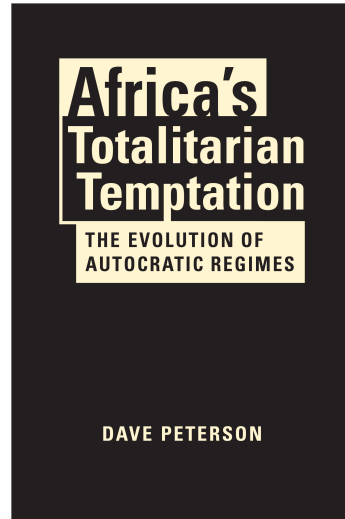
EXCERPTED FROM

Africa's Totalitarian
Temptation:
The Evolution of
Autocratic Regimes

Dave Peterson

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1

Africa's Totalitarian Temptation

Yes, totalitarianism beckons Africa once again. Familiar and back in fashion, the old flame has returned. It matters not how different the geopolitics are from what prevailed some few generations ago. Of course, there is no longer a Nazi threat, no longer a Cold War, no longer the deprivations of colonialism, no longer the independence ideologies that animated much of Africa in the past century. Yet, many of the essential features of Africa's new totalitarianism clearly recall that peculiar system of tyranny that once subjugated a great part of the world, inflicting war, genocide, and terror and stifling human freedom. Manifest today in a handful of African countries, the new totalitarianism has demonstrated vigor, durability, and growing appeal. Repressive political systems have long thrived in Africa, but totalitarianism is distinct. Indeed, a wide range of authoritarian and semiauthoritarian regimes still hold sway in many countries of Africa. Anarchy, warlords, terrorism, insecurity, corruption, and other symptoms of poor governance cause great suffering across the continent as well. Totalitarianism, however, has features that set it apart, as is explained in this book. In the pages that follow, I confirm its presence, depict its behavior, assess the implications, and suggest the response.

The totalitarian temptation in Africa is no mere academic debate. It has been present and continues to percolate throughout the current African political discourse, surfacing in policies and actions that affect the daily lives of millions of African citizens. Increasingly, critics denounce certain African governments as "totalitarian." Yet these same governments have promised, and sometimes delivered to their citizens, good governance and thriving economies. Abroad, respected international opinion leaders laud their performance and vision for the future. These governments are generating new

policies, laws, behaviors, and patterns that have established a degree of control and are building a record of success that rivals anything achieved by African dictatorships or democracies, whether past or present. They are having influence, and their example is spreading. Many Africans have either embraced or submitted to this new political order; some are resisting.

As the globe shrinks, as social media dissolves borders psychologically, refugees disregard them physically, and leaders attempt to resurrect them politically, the free world now confronts the ascendance of nondemocratic governance systems that defy the former neoliberal status quo. These systems call into question the sanctity of competitive, free and fair elections; the separation of powers; the inviolability of individual rights such as speech, assembly, and religion; and the role of security forces. They include theocratic, kleptocratic, and populist dictatorships, as well as what could be described as stable, technocratic, and benevolent autocracies. But some of these systems are going further, not content with control over government and regime, but determined to make the entire social order subservient, including media, religion, business, and civil society. They have at their disposal advanced communications and surveillance technology, sufficient reservoirs of money, and powerful police, intelligence, and military forces. They have transcended national boundaries, sharing with one another techniques, as well as political, financial, and other means of support, to stay in power. Robert Kagan decries the reemergence of authoritarianism around the globe and despairs the lack of a democratic liberal response. The distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism is fading, he contends, as surveillance technology overcomes the former limitations of coercive political systems to make effective means of absolute control more widely available.¹ Africa has not been immune from global trends, and variations on many of these nondemocratic systems may be found in Africa. And so it is that, after almost disappearing from the scene, totalitarianism is back on the global agenda. With the advent of new forms of information and surveillance technology, Larry Diamond has warned of “a nightmarish modern-day version of Nineteen Eighty-Four,” or what he has called “‘postmodern totalitarianism,’ in which individuals appear to be free to go about their daily lives, but the state controls and censors all information flows while compiling ‘social credit scores’ that mash up every type of digital footprint an individual leaves into an overall indication of political and social reliability.”² Africa has its own experience and lessons to add to this global evolution of autocracy. Ominous, yet beguiling, totalitarianism beckons us all.

Governments espousing authoritarian models of economic development and political control are nothing new; in fact, they have dominated Africa since independence. During the 1960s, Ghana, Guinea, and Mali formed the Casablanca group of countries advocating socialist policies. In

the 1970s and 1980s, seven African countries described themselves as Marxist-Leninist, including Benin, Congo-Brazzaville, Madagascar, and Somalia, and three others went so far as to formally align themselves with the Soviet Union, namely, Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia.³ On the right of the political spectrum, regimes such as Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire, South Africa's apartheid system, Idi Amin's Uganda, Francisco Macías Nguema's Equatorial Guinea, and Jean-Bédél Bokassa's Central African Republic all went well beyond standard authoritarian norms, imposing radical policies of social control and brutally repressing opposition.

Crawford Young has traced the waves of Africa's political opening and closing in tandem with Samuel Huntington's successive global waves of democratization, including a first wave, the era of African independence from colonialism, which corresponded with the restoration of democracy in Europe in the aftermath of World War II; a second wave, which he confesses was more of a stirring than a tsunami, when Ghana and Nigeria briefly experienced weak, democratic government in the late 1970s, which coincided with the fall of fascism in Greece, Spain, and Portugal; and Africa's third wave of liberation that began in 1989 with the sovereign national conference of Benin, which coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Young notes how quickly, from the beginning of African independence, the democratic structures foisted on Africa by departing colonial regimes were discarded in favor of the single mass party, and how in pursuit of rapid development, Africa looked to the Soviet bloc and Maoist China for examples, later culminating in the Afro-Marxist regimes.⁴ But analysts have rarely classified any African regimes as totalitarian. They have deemed Africa too undeveloped, too fragmented, too dependent, and too technologically deficient to host such a system. Or more positively, they have postulated that Africa is too pluralistic, resulting at worst in "mobilizational authoritarian regimes."⁵ Africa played a part in World War II and was often a Cold War battleground, or a geopolitical pawn, but no one ever considered it a major contender in the ideological contest between the democratic and totalitarian powers. Rather, Africa has been marginalized in geopolitical debates, dismissed as a nonplayer, backward, inconsequential. Yet developments in Africa have consequences for the rest of the world, every bit as much as the rest of the world impacts Africa.

Africa's Marxist experiments ultimately failed and the most notorious dictators have all died, but authoritarian governments have survived and changed with the times. Contrary to my presumptions and those of other democracy advocates, it can no longer be denied that a handful of these governments have successfully achieved stability, economic growth, and international respectability. Ostensibly, they appear to be well governed, though this cannot belie, upon even a cursory investigation, the lack of basic political freedoms as well as the disturbing extent and unique aspects of the

repression. This book will show why these governments must be considered not simply authoritarian but full-blown totalitarian systems despite their, as the Chinese might say, "African characteristics." Several governments will be shown to be prime examples of this phenomenon, while others in Africa that have also been condemned for their repression and sometimes even described as totalitarian will be shown to not, in fact, be totalitarian, strictly defined. Whatever the case may be, many not-yet totalitarian African governments have begun to emulate the totalitarian models, adopting new policies and behaviors or maintaining old ones that reinforce their control and deprive their citizens of rights and freedom. The temptation pertains, thus, not just to a handful of countries that have nearly consolidated totalitarian systems, but to the political evolution of the entire continent.

In this new era, Africa poses a set of questions that the rest of the world is also asking and must answer. Is there a moral equivalency, a trade-off? Is the new totalitarian model superior to democracy, more effective in delivering good governance, promoting economic growth, and maintaining peace? Is it, or should it be, Africa's future? And is democracy by contrast inherently flawed in the African context, incapable of providing sustainable development, rooting out corruption, suppressing ethnic conflict, or establishing order? Is democracy just a foreign ideology masking the plunder of resources, installing favored leaders, fronting for an international agenda antithetical to African interests? A related question concerns the nature of freedom. Is it an absolute value, or is it a luxury, the fantasy of a few rabble-rousers, inconsiderate of the needs of the society as a whole? What does it mean to be free, what use is freedom? Is it some abstraction that ignores the material needs of human beings, or does it provide something more tangible, something worth fighting and even dying for, beyond religious or ethnic identity or financial gain? Can it help Africans resolve their problems, or does it only exacerbate them? Then there is the notion of human rights. Is it, too, a Western imposition, a hypocritical stance that devalues communal values and judges Africans by a different standard than that which applies to Americans or Europeans? Is it only African abusers who go before the International Criminal Court (ICC) and not more powerful abusers in the West guilty of crimes at least as egregious? Does the right to freedom of assembly too often lead to violent demonstrations, freedom of speech to libel and incitement, freedom of religion to fanaticism and terrorism? Does rule of law mean the criminals with money go free while the poor citizen, falsely accused of stealing a chicken, must languish in prison? Do all these vaunted liberal democratic values bring more anarchy than social cohesion? Do they mean faith in a strange text, a constitution, or international declaration rather than in God or ancient traditions?

Hannah Arendt once said in an interview, "Totalitarianism begins in contempt for what you have. The second step is the notion: 'things must

change—no matter how, Anything is better than what we have.”⁶ Africa today provides fertile ground for such thinking. Arguably, its lagging development, insecurity, corruption, and inept governance lend themselves to authoritarian solutions. Furthermore, the decades of one-party rule, the persistent poverty, the colonial legacy, the natural resource curse incentivizing rent-seeking and clinging to power, and certain traditional governance structures can also theoretically form the basis for authoritarian, patriarchal, “neopatrimonial” politics. Viewed in contrast to the frequently disappointing performance of most of Africa’s relatively young democracies, the achievements of a few particularly strong, righteous, supreme leaders are, not surprisingly, admired by many African leaders as well as ordinary citizens. Ostensibly, these neo-totalitarian leaders have stood austere and incorruptible while their democratic counterparts have lavished exorbitant salaries on members of Parliament and heads of state, flaunting their corruption. While the new totalitarians have pursued their vision of justice and growth, in many democracies the wealthy and powerful have bent the rules to enrich and protect themselves, even as the majority of citizens have languished in poverty. The new totalitarians claim to have delivered peace, order, and security, while many democracies have floundered in incompetence, nepotism, and patronage. They have united their polities and imposed discipline, while many democracies have fallen into ethnic and political conflict, rife with intolerance and demagoguery. The totalitarian leaders are elected with massive majorities, and national public opinion polling suggests they really are incredibly popular. And it is not only Africans. Shamelessly, many European, US, and other international policymakers and donors fawn over these regimes that claim to have achieved international development goals of good governance, economic growth, stability, and harmony despite the limits those regimes have placed on citizens’ so-called rights.

Democracy and human rights have by no means disappeared from the African agenda. Not yet. Most African governments and the African Union (AU) still officially espouse democracy and human rights; many grassroots activists, journalists, and politicians still call for it; and continent-wide, public opinion polling demonstrates broad, if not always unequivocal, support for it. Every year many African governments are holding better and reasonably democratic elections, such as those in Nigeria in 2015 and in Côte d’Ivoire, Benin, and Ghana in 2016. Dictators continue to succumb to democratic transitions, including Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso in 2015 and Yahya Jammeh of Gambia in 2016. Internationally, policy declarations and foreign aid budgets continue to acknowledge the need for democracy, even if the tone has become softer and the budgets more modest. For that matter, many dictators still feel compelled to declare themselves to be democrats, though often qualifying the definition. Nevertheless, for many reasons, the consensus in favor of democracy that has prevailed in Africa over the past

quarter century is diminishing. Democracy's advocates are increasingly finding themselves demoralized or on the defensive. Ten to 20 years ago, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and other African heads of state tried to build agreement around NEPAD, the New Partnership for African Development, and the AU established the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) to encourage good governance and respect for human rights. Today, few African heads of state are as adamant in championing democracy as they once were, and opposition politicians are being imprisoned, popular advocates are being silenced, and international support for democracy has waned.

If the intrinsic value of liberal democracy is to be embraced and fought for, there must be a firm understanding of why it is necessary. For those who advocate fervidly for democracy, who have not given up the struggle, the cause is not served by denying that the totalitarian model has had achievements. Nor is it advanced by pretending that the totalitarian model is only transitional, that it is not really totalitarian, that it is doomed to fail, or that it is harmless. It is not advanced by pretending that democracy is ultimately superior and destined to prevail, that no effort need be expended on its behalf, or that it will happen of its own accord. And it is not advanced by pretending that none of this matters, that the consequences are immaterial for most Africans, that both sides are morally equivalent, and all of this is really alien to African politics anyway. Rather than surrender, rather than deny the threat or turn a blind eye, it is time for democrats to wake up, get their act together, and provide an appealing alternative. As is the case globally, it is best to admit the need to join in an ideological contest for Africans' hearts and minds and to enter into the fray fully aware of the challenges and contradictions. The future of Africa is at stake, with implications for the world. In this book, I have thus assembled facts and provided analysis to be considered in weighing the relative merits of the contending camps. I then draw some conclusions regarding the totalitarian temptation and speculate about its future prospects.

Totalitarianism Defined

Given the pejorative connotations surrounding the label *totalitarian*, the term must be applied with precision as well as with a full appreciation for the implications of such a designation. Otherwise, it becomes just another insulting epithet with little analytical value. A massive amount of political science literature has been devoted to the subject.⁷ Until recently, the threat totalitarianism once represented to the Western democracies seemed to have receded. Study and debate over totalitarianism did revive somewhat in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, but it was as if it had nearly disappeared.⁸ Today, however, as the power of the surveillance state has grown

with the pervasiveness of the internet and the tide of populist authoritarianism rises around the globe, the danger of totalitarianism is once again frequently invoked in contemporary discourse. Sales of George Orwell's book *1984* have soared. In this context, there is a danger that the true gravity conveyed by the word *totalitarianism* will become cheapened and diluted by careless usage. With more serious application, totalitarianism, in current geopolitics, continues to find some resonance in the concern with North Korea, a vestigial and eccentric anachronism that nevertheless retains its power to oppress its own people in labor camps and threaten the rest of the world with nuclear weapons. Cuba also still retains much of its totalitarian legacy, although this has faded steadily with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the retirement and death of Fidel Castro, and the slow normalization of relations with the United States. No one today still declares Russia or China to be totalitarian regimes, although residual and resurgent totalitarian features of these and some other governments should be of serious concern. Given these circumstances, some scholars have concluded that although authoritarian governments persist, totalitarianism has disappeared in the modern world. William Dobson, in warning of the current ascendance of authoritarianism, has dismissed totalitarianism as "a distinctly twentieth-century phenomenon," "the most ambitious undemocratic gamble ever made, and it performed poorly."⁹

This is in dramatic contrast to the prevailing sentiment in the West just some 60 years ago, when the scholar Carl Friedrich asserted that "totalitarianism is the most perplexing problem of our time."¹⁰ Even after the defeat of Adolf Hitler's Germany and the death of Joseph Stalin, the power and menace of totalitarianism generated enormous debate not only among political scientists but among just about anyone working in government, business, labor, psychology, arts, and literature. The ongoing strategic challenge posed by the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War undoubtedly focused attention on totalitarianism. At that time, the precise understanding of totalitarianism was only beginning to gain some consensus. Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski proffered their influential definition in 1956, which included six key elements:

- An elaborate ideology, consisting of an official body of doctrine covering all vital aspects of man's existence to which everyone living in that society is supposed to adhere, at least passively; this ideology is characteristically focused and projected toward a perfect final state of mankind—that is to say, it contains a chiliastic claim, based upon a radical rejection of the existing society with conquest of the world for the new one.
- A single mass party typically led by one man, the "dictator," and consisting of a relatively small percentage of the total population (up to

10 percent) of men and women, a hard core of them passionately and unquestioningly dedicated to the ideology and prepared to assist in every way in promoting its general acceptance, such a party being hierarchically, oligarchically organized and typically either superior to, or completely intertwined with, the governmental bureaucracy.

- A system of terror, whether physical or psychic, effected through party and secret-police control, supporting but also supervising the party for its leaders, and characteristically directed not only against demonstrable “enemies” of the regime, but against more or less arbitrarily selected classes of the population; the terror whether of the secret police or of party-directed social pressure systematically exploits modern science, and more especially scientific psychology.
- A technologically conditioned, near-complete monopoly of control, in the hands of the party and of the government, of all means of effective mass communication, such as press, radio, and motion pictures.
- A similarly technologically conditioned, near-complete monopoly of the effective use of all weapons of armed combat.
- A central control and direction of the entire economy through the bureaucratic coordination of formerly independent corporate entities, typically including most other associations and group activities.¹¹

Juan Linz has offered an authoritative and more updated definition of totalitarianism for the 21st century, noting the following characteristics:

- There is a monistic but not a monolithic center of power, and whatever pluralism of institutions or groups exists derives its legitimacy from that center, is largely mediated by it, and is mostly a political creation rather than an outgrowth of the dynamics of the preexisting society.
- There is an exclusive, autonomous, and more or less intellectually elaborate ideology with which the ruling group or leader, and the party serving the leaders, identify and which they use as a basis for policies or manipulate to legitimize them. The ideology has some boundaries beyond which lies heterodoxy that does not remain unsanctioned. The ideology goes beyond a particular program or definition of the boundaries of legitimate political action to provide, presumably, some ultimate meaning, sense of historical purpose, and interpretation of social reality.
- Citizen participation in and active mobilization for political and collective social tasks are encouraged, demanded, rewarded, and channeled through a single party and many monopolistic secondary groups. Passive obedience and apathy, retreat into the role of “parochial” and “subjects,” characteristic of many authoritarian regimes, are considered undesirable by the rulers.

Linz also described the feedback between the center and the processes of participation within the controlled organizations, the role of propaganda and intellectuals, the use of terror, the system's collective or mobilizational aspects, the emphasis on conformity, and the frequent development of the cult of the leader as salient characteristics of totalitarianism. Some of these characteristics may also appear in nontotalitarian authoritarian regimes, however; and conversely, some of these characteristics may not be present in all totalitarian regimes.¹² He observed that no two totalitarian systems are alike, despite similarities. Fascism, Nazism, Stalinism, Maoism, and their permutations learned from one another, copying some elements and avoiding others, developing according to the particular social and historical circumstances of each system. The ideological foundations of Nazism were thin and irrational, and the system was ultimately short lived; those of Marxism claimed a scientific basis that allowed for a wide range of interpretations, including some that are even liberal democratic.¹³ For the purposes of this study, Linz's notion of monism is critical and requires further definition. It is defined as "the conception that there is one causal factor in history; the notion of a single element as primary determinant of behavior, social action, or institutional relations."¹⁴

In a later formulation, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan proposed "post-totalitarianism" as a regime type to help explain changes such as those that occurred in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. According to Linz and Stepan, post-totalitarianism encompasses a continuum that includes early, frozen, and mature post-totalitarian systems. Early post-totalitarianism is typically distinguished by some constraints on the leader; frozen post-totalitarianism shows some tolerance of civil society critics; and mature post-totalitarianism features change in most aspects of the totalitarian system with the exception of the leading role of the party. While the absence of political, economic, and social pluralism is the defining characteristic of totalitarianism, according to Linz and Stepan, in authoritarian regimes there may be limited political pluralism and extensive economic and social pluralism. In the post-totalitarian systems, significant social and economic pluralism can be found as a result of regime-led "de-totalitarianization," civil society pressure, or decay of the system. Political pluralism, however, is not allowed, except in the case of satellite parties. In a post-totalitarian system, the leader always emerges from the ruling party, although the post-totalitarian leader, typically succeeding the death of the "maximum leader," may be more bureaucratic and technocratic than charismatic. Leadership of the "frozen" post-totalitarian systems may tend to be oligarchic and geriatric, and hence prone to collapse. Related to this is the decreasing power of ideology, going from its use to "mobilize enthusiasm" to its use to simply "maintain acquiescence," although unlike in authoritarian systems, ideology is at least still accorded

lip service. With the weakening of ideology, performance is given greater emphasis to legitimate the regime. Likewise, although mass institutions and mass mobilization still occur in post-totalitarian systems, participants tend to get bored and may escape to the private domain.¹⁵

Beyond such contributions from political science, other texts also serve as essential references. In her classic *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt focused on the totalitarian regimes of Adolf Hitler's Germany and Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union, identifying their origins in the uprootedness and "atomization" of her times. Arendt showed how the development of anti-Semitism and the colonial experiments of imperialism, especially in Africa, provided some of the foundations for totalitarianism.¹⁶ She traced the emergence of the mob and demonstrated how this could lead to totalitarianism's mobilization and domination of "the masses" through terror and propaganda. She described the development of totalitarian movements, including the use of front organizations, and noted the perverse nature of the bureaucracy in totalitarian states, the aspiration to world conquest, the function of secret police to dominate society rather than simply to secure the regime, and the use of indoctrination and absolute terror, including in camps.¹⁷ She noted that totalitarian ideology is less concerned about its content than "the logical process which could be developed from it."¹⁸ She also analyzed the use of racism and anti-Semitism in totalitarian ideology.

Documentation of the Nazi and Soviet systems is extensive. But beyond the work of social scientists, Linz has recommended an examination of literary writing.¹⁹ Indeed, the popular conception of totalitarianism has been well conveyed through literature, in fictional works such as George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, as well as in nonfiction, such as Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. These and similar works grasp the psychological and emotional impact of totalitarianism, not just because they offer powerful literary visions of potential dystopias or witness the terror of prison camps and secret police. Such works also posit totalitarian ideal types and add normative content to the political science descriptions and analyses of totalitarianism. They show how totalitarianism is not simply an alternative system of governance, a system that might entail the sacrifice of some lives and some limits on personal freedom, a system that ultimately could be for the greater good, or one that can organize society and deliver benefits. For these authors, totalitarianism threatened the very essence of what it means to be a human being and the ultimate trajectory of civilization. One might accuse the fictional accounts of being exaggerations, caricatures, and fantasies not reflecting any historical reality. Yet most readers will recognize the truths these authors convey and the dangers about which they warn. Like that of

the political scientists, their work provides some useful reference points with which to analyze these systems.

Huxley's totalitarian vision preceded World War II. His future world state is relatively peaceful and prosperous, made comfortable by technological marvels and drugs. Yet social stratification, indoctrination, eugenic manipulation, and absolute bureaucratic control have led to a nightmarish world devoid of freedom and natural human emotions. In the end, the protagonist, John the Savage, unable to reconcile his former life of squalor and freedom on the reservation with the celebrity and order of "civilization," hangs himself. A totalitarian paradise reveals its dark side. Another early novel about totalitarianism, *We*, written around 1920 by Yevgeny Zamyatin, similarly portrays an orderly but vicious system, in which freedom is a crime and society must be protected from the chaos beyond the wall.

While Huxley and Zamyatin describe futuristic dystopias, other authors have sought to depict nightmarish visions more closely rooted in the present. Writing shortly after World War II, Orwell portrayed a violent and decrepit social order reflective of the totalitarian menace that had been partly defeated but remained present. He focused on the struggle of the individual against the omniscient presence of Big Brother, the security state. He portrayed the emasculation of language to manipulate human consciousness; the insinuation of the state and party into every aspect of an individual's being; the manufacture of a radical new order divorced from history and traditional society; the threat and prosecution of war in justifying the actions of the state; the deterioration of living standards and human values; the recruitment of informers and the use of information technology to spy; the use of turmoil within the ruling party and the abstract presence of the charismatic leader to exercise control; the differentiation between the party elite, its cadres, and the vast majority of the sheep-like population, the "proles"; and the sense of despair and resignation that ultimately prevails. Likewise, Koestler's narrative of the psychological turmoil and breakdown of a party leader in the course of his trial and execution, written shortly before World War II, synthesizes the experience of individuals in the totalitarian systems as they approached the apex of their strength. Orwell echoes Koestler's description of the absurdity and brutality of totalitarianism, including the torture and prison system.

African literature is full of accounts of repressive colonial systems and their dysfunctional successors. Prison literature, such as Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* and Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died*, compares to the works of Solzhenitsyn and Koestler in terms of the despair, absurdity, and courage described. The fictional works of Chinua Achebe, such as *Anthills of the Savannah*, Ben Okri in his *Famished Road*, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* are a small sample of Africa's literature of repression. They describe the corruption, brutality, and lack of freedom

that have characterized many postcolonial African regimes. None of these stories are about political systems that can automatically be recognized as totalitarian, but they do portray the fertile ground from which such a system might spring. J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* approaches a totalitarian vision as it alludes to the South African apartheid regime. There is plenty in these books and those of many other African authors that is every bit as grim and despairing as what can be found in the work of Orwell or Huxley. Africans' variety of experiences of political oppression unite them with those around the world who have had similar experiences, but their descriptions of these experiences in literature also contain certain distinctions, such as the colonial legacy, the burden of racism, references to tradition, religion, and superstition, and the contradictions of the modern political order. The systems these accounts describe are not quite totalitarian, but they help us understand the temptation.

Likewise, although the African political science and ethnographic literature has largely continued to avoid use of the term *totalitarian*, it has described a variety of autocratic systems and sought to categorize them with names such as neopatrimonial, prebendal, integral, Islamist, biopolitical, Afrocommunist, Afro-Stalinist, and kleptocratic. This literature provides an understanding of the manifestations and mechanisms of repression in Africa that have evolved over time. The concept of totalitarianism, however, deserves due consideration as a way of analyzing African autocracies, especially because the term is increasingly used in common parlance to describe a variety of African regimes. Beyond the Africanist literature, this book draws parallels between the evolution of autocracy in Africa in the past decade and what is transpiring in the rest of the world, thus locating Africa in the current global political discourse. It thus argues that an old concept, forged mainly in the mid-20th century trauma of Europe but gaining new relevance around the world, also applies in today's Africa.

In sum, the literature on totalitarianism that has just been briefly reviewed presents the moral imperative for democracy and human rights, the difference between right and wrong, the reason why freedom remains a human aspiration, and the danger that totalitarianism poses for humanity. The authors implicitly juxtaposed the oppression of the totalitarian world with values upholding human rights and democracy—including freedom of speech and thought, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of religion and the rule of law, freedom from torture and police brutality, free and fair elections, and the right to life. Today, these human rights are usually regarded as universal values, not particular to the West or the developed world. Obviously, this consensus has not always existed, as demonstrated by the ascendance of totalitarianism only 80 years ago. Now, including in Africa, the consensus is no longer unassailable. Although Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini embraced the totalitarian

label, Africa's new totalitarians refrain from doing so; they are more elusive and subtle, preferring to describe their regimes as somehow democratic. They may criticize neoliberal ideology and denounce Western cultural and political hegemony, but they have adapted to it. They choose their words carefully. Rather than attacking the democratic consensus head-on, they deflect it, re-define it, or simply pretend it does not exist. They have turned the moral imperative on its head, suggesting that the security and development brought about by their rule is more popular with the masses and conducive to human rights than is the existence of a political opposition or a free press. Thus, the new totalitarians are often elusive, coy, incognito, difficult to pin down. That is why it is necessary to know exactly what to look for.

Although Linz, Arendt, and Friedrich and Brzezinski, as well as the novelists, emphasize different aspects of totalitarianism, there is enough agreement among their writings to make a working diagnosis for totalitarianism possible. Linz advises looking for the conflation of party and state, an all-encompassing ideology, and mass mobilization. Friedrich and Brzezinski, in addition to the elements of chiliastic ideology and party-state that overlap with Linz, add the use of terror, technological control of communications and force, and control over the economy and civil society, which Linz also alluded to in his definition. Arendt reinforces the focus on terror and ideology, dissecting the hypocrisy and cynical utilitarianism of it, its structures and mechanics, and the psychology that creates and drives it. She traces the relationship between anti-Semitism, totalitarianism, and genocide. And Orwell helps us to appreciate the role of technology, terror, and propaganda, providing the term *Orwellian* that so perfectly captures totalitarianism's doublespeak. Huxley shows that totalitarianism need not be forever violent or economically unsuccessful, that it might exist as a stable and efficient, all-powerful and all-knowing system, a particularly important insight in the postmodern African context. Friedrich suggests passive obedience is sufficient in a totalitarian system, while Linz insists that totalitarianism demands conformity and active, if not voluntary, mass participation.

But Linz disagrees with Arendt's concept of the alienation of mass society as a basis for totalitarianism and de-emphasizes the use of terror. Further, he does not consider a single supreme leader to be inevitable in a totalitarian system, although he admits this is probable. Linz notes totalitarianism's appeal, its pseudo-democratic enlistment of the masses in its utopian project. He explains how ideology provides totalitarian systems with legitimation and a sense of mission and describes the role of the party in expressing the unique syndrome of ideology, monistic power, and mass mobilization. Linz also helpfully distinguishes totalitarianism from sultanism and various forms of authoritarianism. Further, he recommends that

the term *systems* be applied to totalitarianism, conveying its infiltration into all of society rather than simply into the formal political and state institutions implied by the terms *regime* and *government*. Linz and Stepan underscore the dynamic nature of totalitarian systems. Totalitarian systems may change over time and may collapse or transform completely into another type of system.

Thus, knowing what to look for, we may begin the search. But at the beginning of the 21st century, as noted earlier, for most political analysts and the general public, totalitarianism had become a fading paradigm, no longer a cause for concern. The rise of the European Union (EU) beginning more than 50 years ago and the fall of the Berlin Wall some 25 years ago have obscured the remnants of the two greatest totalitarian models. China's slow but steady opening since the demise of Mao Zedong had removed that system from consideration as a totalitarian country, however undemocratic and repressive it remains. China's free market, developing associational life, diminishing ideological fervor, and declining mobilizational character have evolved radically from Mao's totalitarian project, despite Diamond's premonition of a postmodern nightmare surveillance state.

The two countries still sometimes categorized today as totalitarian, Cuba and North Korea, both conform to the definition that has been elaborated due to their conflation of state and party, promotion of an overarching ideology, and efforts at mass mobilization. The use of terror, technology, propaganda, and economic and social control also still pertains. Nevertheless, as their systems have aged, they have also lost their vigor, and neither country poses much of a threat to the world order. Both are small, relatively isolated, and economically feeble. Their citizens suffer, and while these countries can inspire international headaches and condemnations, they present nowhere near the same existential threat to the free world that the ambitions for global domination of fascism and communism once did. Both Cuba and North Korea might soon be candidates for the post-totalitarian category. Other very repressive governments exist, such as those of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, and Belarus, but all of them fail to meet at least some of the essential conditions for classification as totalitarian regimes. Elsewhere, by the year 2017, authoritarianism was resurging in Russia and some other Central Asian and Latin American countries, but significant pockets of pluralism have survived in these countries, and ideology and the mass movement are essentially absent, disqualifying them from consideration as incipient totalitarian systems.

Even if it has all but disappeared elsewhere in the world, the totalitarian urge, dormant for at least a quarter of a century, has revived in Africa. As already noted, it is dressed up differently, often comes across as relatively benign, stays on good terms with the West, and projects stability and economic prosperity. It is protecting international strategic and secu-

rity interests. The trains, so to speak, are running on time. But having carefully defined totalitarianism, we see that what can now be found in Africa, in all the essential features, is recognizably the same totalitarianism that scholars debated 60 years ago. The siren call today is no less seductive than it was then. At their peak, Hitler and Stalin had many fans, both at home and abroad. Asserting that something comparable is happening in Africa, however—and as will be shown, having discovered ample confirmation of it in the political science literature as well as in popular conceptions of totalitarianism—does not mean to imply that what is happening in Africa is a regression to earlier political models or that it fits neatly into any typological box. Africa's totalitarian temptation may draw on the legacy of communist ideology and include historical and cultural experiences with parallels in other parts of the world, but it is otherwise unprecedented. It is modern, dynamic, self-confident, defiant. As it evolves, it becomes less revolutionary than status quo, less alarming than reassuring. It belongs to a specifically African context, with all the demographic, economic, cultural, and historical baggage that brings. It can teach lessons that can be applied elsewhere, just as it may be borrowing ideas from other modern authoritarian systems. It is by no means isolated from the international system but is in fact quite integrated and compatible with it. Unlike Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, Africa's totalitarian systems are not engaged in a geopolitical battle for global supremacy. They are not even minor players in some new cold war, despite their implication in a new scramble for Africa pitting China and/or Russia versus the West. They pose no threat to the West. For the most part, they want to be our friends.

The "temptation" has multiple dimensions, including totalitarianism's appeal to the African masses and African elites as well as to Western policymakers and scholars. In the old days, the seductiveness of totalitarianism was frequently noted, including the idealism and enthusiasm often associated with it, in contrast to the apathy or cynical acquiescence generated by mere authoritarianism or the disillusion sometimes aroused by democracy.²⁰ In *The Totalitarian Temptation*, written at the dawn of Samuel Huntington's third wave of democracy and the global nadir of democratic government, Jean-François Revel fretted about what he perceived to be the West's retreat in the face of the Communist advance. For the masses, particularly in the third world, communism presented an alternative based on class struggle and economic justice. For many liberal elites, its appeal was based on what Revel considered to be an unfair critique of the economic and moral consequences of capitalism. In particular, he blamed the left for its attitude ranging from "overt complicity to timid inaction."²¹ Today, the irony is that the totalitarian systems Revel feared have almost entirely collapsed, largely due to their own structural contradictions, but also arguably due to the resolve

of the democratic West. In contrast, the new totalitarian temptation, despite its underlying critique of the West, has not only generated Western sympathizers but has also found a compatibility and projected an image in the West that arouses support and praise. Today, the West no longer cowers in fear or fails to muster the political will to confront totalitarianism. Rather, in the case of Africa, it is often confused and conflicted, sometimes embracing it as an ally, sometimes ignoring the reality or diminishing it. A growing number of Western critics, to be sure, have raised their voices in alarm, including many within Western governments. But their oft-plaintive appeals hardly resonate beyond policy papers and legislative hearings. Theory therefore needs to be enlisted to clarify this cognitive dissonance. Linz has called for a typology of totalitarian systems that includes a more dynamic analysis of change in and of totalitarian systems as well as comparison with other nondemocratic regimes so as to better evaluate them. "Certainly totalitarian systems must have many positive features that make them attractive to people who are not ignorant of some of their worst features," he suggests.²² In that spirit, the following methodology is proposed.

Methodology

The methodology of this study consists of three sets of indicators supported by a range of primary and secondary sources. Like authoritarianism, totalitarianism is an autocratic system of government sharing all the attributes of repression and the absence of civil and political rights typical of such systems. In pursuit of evidence of totalitarianism in Africa, therefore, the first indicator to be determined is the level of political and civil freedom, which is readily provided by Freedom House's annual Freedom in the World Index. Many other worthy indices exist, including the Afrobarometer, the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, and the V-Dem Annual Democracy Report, all of which can be cited to reinforce the Freedom House findings and provide a more comprehensive appreciation of the political systems discussed in this book. Although the Freedom House index has certain weaknesses, it is the oldest and most widely used measure of democracy and freedom, or lack thereof.

Countries are scored from 1 to 7 in two categories: political rights, such as the quality of elections, and civil liberties, such as freedom of speech. Countries with a 1 are the freest, and those with a 7 are the least free. The scores do not necessarily reflect government performance, but rather the freedoms experienced by the people; thus, countries in violent conflict tend to be less free. In the 2013 report, of the 48 countries in the world categorized as "not free," 17 were in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, the scope of this analysis was immediately narrowed to those 17. The worst group, receiving

a rating of 7 in both political and civil rights, included Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan. The Central African Republic was added to this category in 2014 after a civil war, and despite successful elections in 2016, it has failed to receive any upgrade due to ongoing insecurity problems. The next worst group, with a combined average of 6.5, included Chad, to which Gambia, Burundi, and Ethiopia were added in 2015. Countries scoring a 6 included Angola, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali (which returned to “partly free” after elections in 2015), Rwanda, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe (which was also upgraded from 6 in 2013 to 5.5 in 2014, and in 2015 climbed to 5, “partly free,” only to fall back to a 6 after a military coup in 2017, a change that will be discussed in more depth). Countries scoring a 5.5 included Congo-Brazzaville, Djibouti, and Gabon. Uganda, which had been “partly free” in 2013, was downgraded to the 5.5, “not free,” group in 2016. In some instances, these fluctuations between “not free” and “partly free” will be worth discussion. For the purposes of this study, however, most countries consistently scoring better than 5 will not be examined, since they qualify as at least “partly free” according to the Freedom House index.

From this group of 17 countries, a second set of indicators will help establish the existence of those countries that may qualify as totalitarian, as opposed to simply authoritarian, systems. These indicators will be based on the three interrelated criteria provided by Linz, as discussed earlier, and will be referred to as (1) monism—that is, the conflation of state, party, security, society, and economy; (2) ideology—particularly its utopian and all-encompassing aspects; and (3) mass mobilization—including the use of labor gangs and other forms of conscription, as well as mass reeducation and indoctrination efforts.

To reinforce the identification of these systems as totalitarian, this study will note a third set of indicators, which are not exclusive to totalitarian systems but often correlate with totalitarian systems and provide their distinctive personalities. These include many of the characteristics cited by the political science and classical references noted earlier, including the use of terror, police, torture, prisons and prison camps, technology, bureaucracy, and surveillance.

Finally, the presence of imperialism and genocide will be explored. These phenomena will not be considered critical indicators, but both have often been associated with totalitarianism, although they have also occurred independently. In the African context, the sequencing and manifestations may be unorthodox, but the presence of imperialism and genocide is nevertheless an additional and intriguing contribution to the totalitarian diagnosis.

To elucidate these indicators, recent data will be gleaned from research conducted by established and reputable institutions such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International (AI), the International Human Rights Federation,

International Crisis Group, Freedom House, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and Reporters Without Borders, as well as governmental and international agencies such as the US State Department and the United Nations (UN). Another source of data will be governmental documents, such as party manifestoes, policy statements, and official reports and statistics. Because of the prominence of the leader in totalitarian systems, a brief biographical sketch of the head of state, as well as selected speeches and writings, will be presented. Likewise, some short historical background for each country will be necessary, highlighting totalitarian moments and the foundations of the development of totalitarianism. Each case will also draw on interviews with dissident politicians, journalists, and civil society activists, as well as published opposition sources. Some scholarly literature, the work of political analysts, and news reports will also be cited. Finally, supporting data will be assembled from grassroots contacts and fieldwork conducted over my more than 30 years of experience in African political development. Due to the sensitivity of some of this information and concern for the security of those involved, however, some of this material will be attributed anonymously.

Having set forth a methodology, this work will present six case-study countries that at some point elsewhere have been characterized as totalitarian systems. The discussion starts with Eritrea, which makes the most convincing case. Yet Eritrea is isolated and exceptional; it fails to suggest a trend or model. The discussion therefore moves to Ethiopia, Eritrea's big sister and, until recently, the most formidable case. In contrast to Eritrea, Ethiopia's example has had implications for the entire continent and largely motivated this study. Next, Rwanda, which is often compared to Ethiopia and represents the most successful case, will be considered. Rwanda's role has been more subtle but at least as influential as that of Ethiopia, and its experiment has proved more durable. Following the advice of Linz, Zimbabwe will then offer a contrasting but therefore a deeper understanding of the totalitarian temptation emanating from the southern Africa region. Zimbabwe offers some lessons regarding the evolution of autocracy in Africa, underscoring both its persistence and its weaknesses and failures. Similarly, Sudan, in the greater Horn, affords an examination of the pioneering experience of totalitarianism's Islamist variant. As in Zimbabwe, the system in Sudan has both survived and failed. The final case to be taken up will be Equatorial Guinea, which closely resembles a totalitarian system but again includes salient distinctions that provide a sharper appreciation of the totalitarian phenomenon. In an effort to be comprehensive, as well as to demonstrate the broad penetration of the totalitarian zeitgeist, a more cursory survey of the remainder of the sub-Saharan continent will be undertaken. Work on this book began with a paper presented to the African Studies Association in 2011, and thus the

focus of this book stretches from the beginning to the end of the second decade of the 21st century. As such, this work has benefited from the dynamic and volatile nature of African politics, making each case study a moving target but also revealing how autocratic regimes evolve and hinting at their future prospects. With that objective, the discussion now turns to a brief review of totalitarianism's history and antecedents in Africa.

Notes

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18. *Ibid.*, 472.
19. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, 29.
20. *Ibid.*, 16.
21. Jean-François Revel, *The Totalitarian Temptation*, trans. David Hapgood (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 39.
22. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, 136.