

African Cosmology: The Bane of Democracy in Africa

Stephen Chijioke Nwinya, PhD

Department of Philosophy and Religion and Peace Studies,
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

Abstract

Liberal democracy is much vaunted as the best political system with the capacity to satisfy man's enduring desire – the quest for recognition. This image of democracy is blurred by the outcome of the imposition of the system on Africa. Decades of efforts to implant democracy in Africa have yielded very minimal positive results. The system as practiced in Africa negates every established principle of democracy. Features palpable in 'African' democracy include god-fatherism, ethnic and religious nepotism, hijack of electoral processes, political inequality and sit-tight-syndrome. Efforts to ascertain the why of failure of democracy in Africa abound with myriads of solutions proffered to no avail. This new effort to get to the root of the crisis of democracy on the continent casts a critical look at African cosmology to see how its fundamental dispositions tally with the principles of democracy. This is propped on the fact that for an imported system to be absorbed, there must be some modification of people's basic beliefs and values. In the case of democracy, as in many other imported systems in Africa, the failure to adapt African cosmology to the principles of democracy facilitates the reverse process of democracy being modified to suit Africans. It is the stand of this write up that democracy does not suit Africa because many fundamental African beliefs and values such as communitarianism, social stratification, respect for elders etc which are anti-democracy are what Africans are fighting to preserve. There must be fundamental cosmological revolution if the much-valued democracy is to take root in Africa.

Key Words: Africa, Leadership, Cosmology, Democracy and Politics

Introduction

It is nearly incontrovertible that democracy is the best system of governance majorly because it claims to give sovereignty to whom it belongs – the people. The beauty of democracy became more enticing with its evolution into liberal-representative democracy. The wave of democracy that followed the end of cold war

was so scintillating and captivating that Fukuyama did not hesitate to declare liberal democracy as the end of history.¹

The term 'democracy' is ambiguous and can be conceptualized, used and misused in multifarious ways. Democracy is most often described than defined. For instance, Abraham Lincoln's democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people is more of description of democratic practice. Etymologically, democracy is derived from two Greek words *demos* and *kratein* meaning people and to rule, respectively. Consequently, democracy has been conceptualized as the rule by the people, self-government by many as against the few or one.² Appadorai conceives democracy as "a system of government in which people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves".³ He goes on to elucidate the conditions sine qua non for a functional democracy which according to him include "the widespread habit of tolerance and compromise among members of a community, a sense of give and take and the provision of adequate opportunities for the individual to develop his personality, proper organization and leadership".⁴ Pericles in Agundu summarizes the conceptualization of democracy thus:

Our constitution is called democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law, when it is a question of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which a man possesses. No one, so long as he has in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty... we are

-
1. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (London: Penguin Books, 1992).
 2. E. S. Greenberg and B. I. Page, *The Struggle for Democracy*, (USA: Longman, 2002), 6.
 3. A. Appadorai, *The Substance of Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 21.
 4. Appadorai, *The Substance of Politics*, 21

free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs, we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect.⁵

From the foregoing, democracy means the rule by the people as contrasted with the rule by a special person or group. It has to be added that democracy is not simply a form of government but also a type of state. This is so because of the difference between the state and the government. A democratic state could be governed otherwise, and this happens especially in an indirect democracy when those, or person, entrusted with power by the people get out of control and arrogate to themselves the power that actually belongs to the people. The state remains democratic but the government something else. Thus, democratic state with undemocratic governance is possible as it obtains in most of African states.

Democracy is more than a set of constitutional rules and procedures that determine how a government functions. In fact, the elements of constitutionalism came into democracy as an effort to strike a balance between the state and the government, the power of the people and its exercise by the government.⁶ In a democracy, the government is only one element coexisting in a social fabric of many and varied institutions. This implies that the government can hardly fail a democracy if the people and institutions understand and play their roles appropriately. This is the pluralism which marks a true democratic society and it assumes that the many institutions and organized groups therein do not depend on government for their existence, legitimacy and authority but independent enough to play mediating roles between the individuals and the complex social and governmental institutions to ensure active participation and effective delivery of the rudiments of democratic dispensation.

5. O. T. Agundu, *Social and Political Philosophy in the Age of Globalization*, (Abuja: DonAfrique Publishers, 2019), 286.

6. C. R. Sunstein, "Constitutions and democracies: an Epilogue" in J. Elster and R. Slagstad (eds), *Constitutionalism and Democracy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 327.

Historically, democracy originated in the Ancient Athens and flourished under Pericle. Since then, democracy has undergone multiple metamorphic deconstructions and reconstructions via various historic interventions that birthed the contemporary Liberal-representative democracy. Today, United States of America is acknowledged as model and champion of democracy since Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence in 1776 and has taken it upon itself to see to the imposition of the system on the rest of the world.

Liberal democracy, common in contemporary societies, is a form of government in which representative democracy operates under the principles of protecting the rights of the individuals. Its features include majority rule, protection of minority interests, preference for bi-partisan or multi-partisanship, protection of individual liberty, sharing of power, free press, free operation of pressure group and impartial judiciary.⁷ Similarly, Haxhiu and Alidemaj conceive representative democracy as

a form of governance in which the people exercise their right to make political decisions through their elected representatives. ... The very essence of representative democracy lies in the fact that the will of the people is fulfilled through representative bodies directly elected by the citizens themselves. The highest state body, elected by the people, is accountable to the people and is obliged to act in accordance with the interest of the latter.⁸

It is the above description and more that forms the parameter for measurement of success or failure of democracy. It is said that there is no perfect democracy as none has mirrored the principles and features of ideal democracy perfectly. However,

7. C. Norton, "The definition and features of liberal democracy", <http://www.virtualkollage.com/2016/03/the-definition-and-features-of-liberal-democracy.html> Accessed on 22/4/23.

8. S. Haxhiu and Avni H. Alidemaj, "Representative democracy – its meaning and basic principles, <http://dj.univ-danubius.ro/index.php/AUDJ/article/view/1253/1447>.

some democracies have made tremendous landmarks in upholding democratic ideal while others have failed woefully. Most of democracies in Africa belong to the latter. It is even arguable if democracy has actually taken root in Africa. Indices abound attesting to the failure of democracy in Africa. Ascertaining the root cause of this failure is the thrust of this paper. This becomes imperative as a way of finding lasting solution to the problem.

After analyzing some crucial efforts already made and suggested solutions to the matter, this write employs expository and comparative method to argue that it is African cosmology – African beliefs, attitude and values – that failed democracy in Africa. This is proved by exposing traditional African disposition towards some fundamental principles of democracy. This is owing to the fact of impromptu superimposition of the system which denied the basic exchange and intercourse which characterize the meeting of two cultures. It concludes that Africa will continue to fail democracy until the kind of revolution that would ensure the conscious adoption of the ideals of democracy is allowed to take place in Africa.

On the Failure of Democracy in Africa

Late 20th century witnessed rapid and extensive democratization such that most countries of the world embraced liberal democracy. It so captivated Huntington that he describes it as the third wave of democratization. He outlines the propelling forces of the process to include: deepening legitimacy problems of authoritarian regimes; unprecedented economic growth which raised standards of living and increased education; and paradigm shift in doctrine and activities of the Catholic Church occasioned by the outcome of the Second Vatican Council; and changes in the policies of external actors especially the European Community, the United States of America and the Soviet Union.⁹

9. S. P. Huntington, *The Third Wave of Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Okiahoma City: University of Okiahoma Press, 1991), 13.

It was during this *third wave* that turns of events in global politics, external pressures and internal wrangling thrust democratization process upon Africa in such a manner that there was no iota of dialogue between democracy and the prevailing political cultural disposition. This saw to the displacement of traditional authoritarian leadership system and leadership style that was traditionally hierarchical and hereditary and the enthronement of multi-party elections. However, legalization of opposition through multi-party system has not produced true democracy in Africa. What seems to obtain is a surreptitious legitimization of authoritarian leadership through periodic process that Odey addresses as "madness called election."¹⁰ Perhaps, democracy in most of Africa is a camouflage ostensibly packaged to avoid the global repercussion of not democratizing. This sort of practice informs Fukuyama's clarification that,

Liberal democracy is more than majority voting in elections; it is a complex set of institutions that restrain and regularize the exercise of power through law and a system of checks and balances. ... The mere fact that a country has democratic institutions tells us very little about whether it is well or badly governed. This failure to deliver on the promise of democracy poses what is perhaps the greatest challenge to the legitimacy of such political systems.¹¹

This is the bane of democracy in Africa. The continent is best fit for what has been described as gray zone – places where there are neither full authoritarian leadership nor meaningful democracy.¹² It is admissible that,

[...] democracy is not all or nothing affair. It is a matter of degree of the extent to which the two principles of popular control and political equality are realized in practice. The answers to the

10. J. O. Odey, *This Madness called Election 2003*, (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2003).

11. Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*, (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2012), 3-4.

12. Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*, 3.

following four questions can be used to measure the level of democracy in a country. First, what kind of electoral system is used – is it free and fair? Secondly, how open and accountable is the government? Thirdly, what civil and political rights exist? And fourthly, does the political and social culture encourage democracy to flourish at all levels in society?¹³

However, one cannot deny the fairness in scoring democracy in Africa abysmally low in all the above parameter for measuring a flourishing democracy. Otherwise, it will be difficult to explain why only little above twenty million out of an estimated population of two hundred and twenty million Nigerians participated in their 2023 general elections. Lamenting the situation, Hassan and Vibes write:

Turnout overall was just 27 per cent, a record low. ... President –elect Tinubu's mandate would flow from less than 10 per cent of Nigeria's electorate. This is a worrying trend that both the government and the political class need to reflect upon – there is an urgent need to improve the quality and relevance of Nigerian democracy.¹⁴

Also detesting what goes on in Africa in the name of democracy with particular reference to Nigeria, Areji avers:

A cursory look at Nigeria's democratic experiments reveals a lacuna between the principles of democracy as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution and the practice of democracy in Nigeria. The flagrant abuse and denial of human rights by detention of individuals without trials, the rape and abuse of democracy through election rigging and selection instead of election of

¹³. D. Roberts (ed), *British Politics in Focus*, (Lanca: Causeway Press Ltd, 1995), 162-3.

¹⁴. I. Hassan, and Alex Vines, "Nigeria: Trust and turnout define 2023 elections", Chatham House, 31 March 2023. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/03/nigeria-trust-and-turnout-define-2023-elections> Accessed: 31/05/2023.

political office holders, sponsored killings and undue process of impeachment of political office holders to satisfy some selfish interests and the indifference of the government to all these points to the fact that the practice of democracy in Nigeria is the opposite of democratic principles.¹⁵

Corroborating Areji, Agundu observes that critical principles of democracy are thwarted in Nigeria as in most of Africa. Referring to the abuse of the principle of majority rule, he maintains, "a cursory examination of this indispensable element of democratic practice vis-a-vis the Nigerian experience shows that democracy is on trial in Nigeria. The power is not with the majority but with the privileged few in the government".¹⁶ These and other abuses of democratic principles in Africa should be admitted.

It can also be conceded that there has been global democratic recession since the 2000s but Africa's case is hardly that of democratic recession. In fact, it can be argued that true democracy has never taken root on the continent. The Arab Spring of 2011 and the Nigeria's End SARS protest of 2020 that could have brought democratic revolutions were hijacked and quelled by political actors. The same political actors with their economic backup resisted and silenced the efforts of the youth to elect the president of their choice during the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria. The failure of democracy in Africa is so conspicuous that it amounts to belabouring the obvious by proving it. The great focus should be on getting to the root of the matter as to gauge the feasibility of salvaging the situation.

Suggesting the cause of failure of democracy in Africa, Meredith laments that Africa

15. A. C. Areji, "Democratic Principles and Practice in Africa: A Comparative Study of Nigeria's Democratic Experiments" in Ike Odimegwu, G. Ezeani and F. Aghamelu (eds) *Philosophy, Democracy and Conflicts in Africa*, (Awka: FAB Educational Books, 2007), 39.

16. Agundu, *Social and Political Philosophy in the Age of Globalization*, 436.

has moved from enormous hope and fervor towards democracy and economic independence to so close to destitution and despair in just a space of two generations. While few states managed to escape the downwards spiral, others are embroiled in war, despotism, corruption and daunting drought. Accounting for the drift of Africa into despondence, he argues that African political leaders easily slip into dictatorship coached in unbridled corruption, repression of opposition and quest to remain in leadership position. He tours different countries of Africa historically to substantiate his claim. Furthermore, he heaps much of the blame for the situation in Africa on the world powers whom he accuses of sponsoring dictatorship and conflicts in Africa. For him, “[...] the solution to Africa's malaise can only come from a combination of effective leadership by Africans themselves and Western assistance”.¹⁷

Similarly, Oguejiofor sees the inability of democracy to flourish in Africa as a hangover of slavery and colonization. He maintains that the worst of all the effects of these two Europe's ugly engagements in Africa is the psychological trauma they bequeathed on the African, creating in him inferiority complex that eroded the sense of worth in anything African from him. All the problems in Africa today, including the crisis of democracy, according to him, are the aftermath of this historicity of Africa. For instance, right from the colonial era, the African has never seen the government as his. Because of this:

To steal from the government was largely not considered immoral. Because African leaders naively embraced the legacies of colonial administration without making any effort to bring government to their people, this corruption has never been tackled nor even understood as a problem.¹⁸

17. Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: From the Hopes of Freedom to the Heart of Despair*, www.usnwe.edu/Navy-Reading/Books. Accessed: 22 June, 2023.

18. J. Obi Oguejiofor, *Philosophy and the African Predicament*, (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2001) 32.

This is one of the major problems with democracy in Africa and accounts for paucity of political participation. The government is a foreigner and no man's business.

Explicating this democratic apathy among Africans, Uwalaka blames the way most states of Africa were formed through imposed arbitrary boundaries that lumped different ethnic nationalities in one state. This gives room to marginalization and exclusion of some nationalities creating the sense that government is an entity the control of which every nationality must strive to gain. With particular reference to Nigeria, he argues that the unity resulting from amalgamation was superimposed by hegemonic power of the West and often on trial through inter and intra tribal, regional and sectional dissension on issues and unhealthy struggle for political power and control.¹⁹ He implies that true democracy can only be achieved by fashioning political inclusiveness in multi-ethnic states.²⁰

In corroboration of Uwalaka, Nwankwo avers that the problem of democracy in Nigeria, as in many other states of Africa, is the existence of multi-ethnic nationalities with different cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds in one imposed geo-political territory. This was done with mere economic intention of facilitation of economic exploitation of the people. He laments that in imposing the false political unity, Britain failed to work out ways by which the various ethnic groups can go beyond political unity to create sense of belonging and participation through inclusiveness.²¹ This initial failure continues to stare democracy in the face because the initial orientation that could have changed the direction of allegiance from ethnic group to the state was not implemented. Thus, there are more ethnic citizens than civil citizens, explaining why the attitude towards democracy is often tribal or regional.

19. Jude Uwalaka, *The Struggle for an Inclusive Nigeria: the Igbo to be or not to be?* (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 2003). 9.

20. Uwalaka, *The Struggle for an Inclusive Nigeria*, 163-4.

21. A. Nwankwo, "Logic of Sovereign National Conference" *Daily Champion Newspaper*, 20 July, 2000

Also related to the above is the argument of conflicting ideologies struggling for supremacy of influence in the African. Mazrui maintains that Africa, having played host to different civilizational forces, is in deep distress arising from the triple heritage of cultures accruing to these forces. He avers, "Africa is at war, it is a war of cultures. It is a war between indigenous Africa and the forces of Western civilizations". Throughout Africa, there appears to be a pronounced curse of cultural sabotage as institutions decay and structures rust away. This crisis on the continent is symptomatic of the failure of transplanted organs of the state and the economy.²²

The present predicament of the African is traceable to his historicity and situatedness, that is, what Mazrui rightly captures as the triple heritage of the African. This cohabitation, in the African, of seemingly irreconcilable cultural heritages of traditionalism, Islam and Western secularism has adverse effect not only in the identity crisis in the individuals but also in the generation of conflicts in post-independence Africa as well ideological conflation which Mazrui captures thus:

Tradition versus Islam, Islam versus Christianity, nationalism versus Islam, Christianity and colonialism, revolution versus neo-colonialism and communism, every segment versus all other segments, and intellectual attempts at reconciliation versus intellectual opposition and hence intellectual confusion.²³

This ideological confusion is most conspicuous in the crisis of democracy in Africa in which the principles of democracy have not been able to displace the traditional African disposition to politics and governance. Political tendencies emanating from traditional African cosmology continue to distort and inhibit all efforts to implant true democracy in Africa.

Campbell and Quinn come close to the point being canvassed in the write up as they

22. Ali Mazrui, *The Africans – A Triple Heritage*, (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1986). 12.

23. Mazrui, *The Africans*, 10.

maintain that the third wave of democratization failed to strengthen democracy in Africa principally because the continent's foundations of a political culture necessary to sustain liberal democracy have been weak for most of the postcolonial era and most significant of these weak foundations, according to them is "persistent religious and ethnic rivalries".²⁴ This is the point on which the arguments of this discourse are based. It is argued here that the absence of necessary foundations for democratic practices in African cosmology and omission of fundamental cosmological dialogue in the processes that brought democracy to Africa bear the culpability of the failure of democracy on the continent.

African Cosmology and the Crisis of Democracy in Africa

Although cosmology is generally known as the branch of philosophy which studies the origin, structure, law and characteristics of the universe, the term is also employed to denote "a system of beliefs that seeks to describe or explain the origin and structure of the universe".²⁵ This system of beliefs seeks to establish the relationship between human beings, as individuals or community, and the rest of the universe and thus closely related to the basic beliefs, values and practices of a people. In this latter sense, people's cosmology is synonymous with their ideology, that is, their worldview. It is in this sense that African cosmology is conceived in this text to describe "the various creation myths and narratives seeking to understand the origin of the planet, existence and our place within the network of space that originates in Africa".²⁶ African cosmology is therefore the basic beliefs, norms and values which inform the African attitude towards, and participation in, the universe. It defines African worldview which permeates African existence.

People's cosmology has firm grip on them and regulates their perception and participation in the world around them thus creating what Fukuyama describes as

²⁵ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/cosmology> Accessed: June 8, 2023

²⁶ <https://homework.study.com/explanation/what-is-african-cosmology.html> Accessed: 21/10/23

institutional inertia which implies people's reluctance to replace old established order with new one.²⁷ This is the fundamental problem of democracy in Africa – the struggle to replace the old political order fecundated by African cosmology with the principles of democracy. This is an odious task exacerbated by lack of proper ideological orientation that could have reformed African cosmology to absorb the incoming political system.

People's cosmology considered as their worldview incorporates their metaphysical, epistemic and ethical outlooks which inform their perception and approaches to the world around and shape their responses to various situations they encounter, controlling their absorption of anything foreign to their conceptualized universe. What this implies is that people conceptualize, value and utilize what they encounter based on their cosmological disposition and unless what is being encountered is powerful enough to alter that cosmology, the latter distorts it by conditioning the encountered to suit it. Current distortion of democracy evident in the way it is practiced in Africa gives credence to this. It is on this note that Campion, emphasizing the importance and power of cosmology, avers:

The influence of cosmology on culture then becomes a matter of exploring its impact on political and religious ideas, and its use in the arts, perhaps mainly in literature, painting and film. ... the intellectual horizon of the human race at any time has always been inextricably bound up with the scale of the universe... there can be little doubt that a people's perceived scale of the universe must play a fundamental role in its culture and consciousness ... culture and consciousness are bound up with conceptions of the universe as a whole.²⁸

27. Fukuyama, *The Origins*, 9.

28. N. Campion, "The Importance of Cosmology in Culture: Contexts and Consequences" in Abraao Capistrano, *Trends in Modern Cosmology*, 2017, DOI: 10.5772/67976 Accessed on 25/5/23.

Campion's view corroborates the fact that people highly treasure their worldview which may not even promote their welfare. Worldview as a belief system conditions people to accept and support a specific way of living and organizing society even though it may not be in their own best interest. Worldview is propagated and perpetuated through the process of socialization that exposes its rudiments as well as the benefits and the sanction to deviations. Thus, the worldview is entranced in the mind of every member of the society which in turn internalizes it as the spirit of existence. It is in line with this that Millard remarks:

Ideology is what justifies the economic, political and social order we live in. If that order is corrupt then ideology is a key part of the rip-off – a way of deluding the exploited people into thinking their exploitation is necessary, normal, or maybe even fair and reasonable.²⁹

In the case of Africa, the ideology was developed long ago, internalized and transmitted for generations and has become part of the people's subconscious disposition and therefore surreptitiously unquestionable. It has remained antagonistic to all system that would have facilitated the rise of the continent to high level of civilization. Part of this traditional ideology is the social/political order that has not been amended to accommodate democratic ideals. The repugnancy of this order to political transformation is attributable to the conservative nature of social order fecundated by the underlying worldview. Observing the conservative nature of social order, Fukuyama writes:

Political institutions develop often slowly and painfully overtime, as human societies strive to organize themselves to master their environments. ... There is something like law of conservation of

29. G. Millard, "Introduction: Approaching political ideologies" in Valerie Vezins, *Political Ideologies and Worldviews: An Introduction*, <https://kpu.pressbook.pub/political.ideologies> Accessed 26:9:22

institutions. Human beings are rule following animals by nature, they are born to conform to social norms they see around them, and entrench those rules with often transcendental meaning and value. When the surrounding environment changes and new challenges arise, there is often a disjunction between the existing institutions and the present needs. Those institutions are supported by legions of entrenched stakeholders who oppose any fundamental changes.³⁰

This is the bane of Africa vis-à-vis development in general and political development in particular. Acemoglu and Robinson have this in mind as they blame Africa's underdevelopment on the vicious circle of extractive economy and exclusive political institution, concentrating power in a few elites whose traditional worldview has conditioned the masses never to challenge.³¹ This is why anti-democratic rulers often easily use the masses to quench any revolution that could bring drastic alteration of the status quo. Campbell and Quinn make similar observation when they remark that a democratic decline is underway in Sub-Saharan Africa as more Africans live under fully or partially authoritarian states. Governments across the continent are becoming more authoritarian and the people are increasingly alienated from those claiming to represent them. The ensuing power struggle among the elite, and the people's efforts to resist oppressive government, result in social instability and economic stagnation. For them, democracy in Africa is in trouble because its principles are at disjunction with the entrenched core African dispositions.³² How can people with entrenched value for social stratification be coerced into a society of individual equality? It is difficult for God-fatherism not to thrive in society where wisdom is associated with old age and

30. Fukuyama, *The Origin*, 7.

31. D. Acemoglu, and J. Robinson *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2012).

32. J. Campbell and Nolan Quinn, "What's Happening to Democracy in Africa?"

the words of the elders are final. Periodic election is alien to people with pre-established life-leadership of hereditary order.

This agrees with Idjakpo and Aigbodioh when they lament the failure of democracy in Africa and its cause, attributing it to the fact that it was considered alien system superimposed on the continent. For them, the party system of democracy produced in Africa, political parties that became agents of destabilization as the parties were used to promote ethnic agendas of politicians which have assumed the culture of democracy in Africa. "Elections are conducted along ethnic lines, with rigging and various forms of electoral malpractices, in order to ensure victories for their respective parties".³³ This goes to prove that Africa has not overgrown the primordial ethnic allegiance characteristic of traditional African society.

What is being posited here is that the core principles of democracy are conspicuously absent in the traditional political upbringing of the African since traditional African socio-political setting do not fecundate their dispositions. For instance, as against individual equality which is indispensable for flourishing of democracy, African traditional socio-political setting is purely communitarian. Individuals are only meaningful in a group and for this to occur, one must distinguish oneself in any particular sphere of life which in turns determines one's social stratum. The implications of this to democracy are enormous. Some individuals are residual of political participation since their social strata do not permit them to contest any political position. Even in voting, they only adhere to the instruction of their acclaimed superiors on how to vote. This is why godfatherism is prevalent in African politics. Once one is anointed by a powerful group or individuals, one celebrates their electoral victory before the election that services only formality purpose. Thus, political participation is never based on individuals' conviction but rather on group perception as championed members of the higher social stratum of the society. This

33. O. G. Idjakpo, and J.A. Aigbodioh "The Philosophy of Ujamaa and the African Predicament", *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy*, 2, no.1, (2009): 114.

implies that competence is not as important as protection of group interest in political selections normally orchestrated as election. This is worsened by multi-ethnicity of most countries in Africa. The leaders of ethnic or religious groups select and project national leaders without regards to democratic principles and overriding national interest and ensure that they remote control them to protect their selfish interest. This is a hangover of traditional African political perception and disposition. It is the fallout of Africa's belief that elders occupy the highest hierarchy of force and nearest to the spiritual world, hence, the words of elders are supreme and inscrutable and therefore beyond probity.

Similarly, separation of powers, which is an indispensable pillar of democracy, is alien to Africa. Starting from the family, the father shares power with no one, his words are final. The same applies to pater familia (head) of extended family and the traditional stool. It is not as if they are inadvisable but they are not bound to any decision. They are beyond human probity and only answerable to the gods from whom, it is believed, they derive their powers. Once any issue is beyond them, the gods must be consulted as the last resort. Idjakpo and Aigbodioh rightly summarize this thus: "[A] typical African monarch shares power with no other titular head as it is the case in modern cabinet government".³⁴

Practicing democracy becomes an uphill to people brought up with such political disposition. It therefore explains why there is camouflage of separation of powers in Africa's democratic experimentation. The chief executive appoints the Chief Justice and selects the principal officers of the legislature. The kind of checks and balances such arrangement produces is better imagined than experienced.

In fact, most of the indispensable rudiments of democracy are at variance with Africa's core values. The problem is not that Africans are incapable of absorbing foreign values or that African values are not amenable. It is rather that the conditions

34. Idjakpo and Aigbodioh, "The Philosophy of Ujamaa and the African Predicament",

sine qua non for mutual exchange were not met ab initio, namely, the mutual interpenetration of the two value systems.

Another indispensable ingredient of democracy at variant with traditional African political disposition is periodic election. Periodic election is so fundamental to democracy which defines democracy as the rule of the people expressing their sovereign will through their vote. Yet, Ayittey acknowledges the fact that there was no voting in traditional African political dispensations.³⁵ In much of Africa, ascension to political leadership is hereditary and hierarchical, and once elevated only in rare cases is deposition possible otherwise it is a life time occupation. This is why sit-tight leadership is bedeviling Africa and many people keep supporting re-election bids of people who have ruled for decades without improving their lots. Summing what goes in the name of periodic elections in Africa, Campbell and Quinn write:

Authoritarian and semi-authoritarian rulers, mindful of foreign opinion, have dressed their regimes with the forms of democracy, such as regular (if rigged) elections and de jure (not de facto) separation of powers. Presidential term limits, where in place, have been frequently circumvented through so-called constitutional coups. Heads of state have deftly manipulated social cleavages and played up fears of malevolent foreign interference to deflect popular pressure away from their illiberal rule.³⁶

This is the root of the charade called election in Africa. The people are complacent and have to be induced to participate in elections because it was not their traditional

35. G. B. N. Ayittey, "The Native System of Government: A Summary Assessment", *Indigenous African Institutions*, 265 – 310, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9781571053374.i-586.44> Accessed: 15 October, 2023.

36. Campbell and Quinn, "What's Happening to Democracy in Africa?"

functions to elect their leaders. This was accomplished through the consensus and rectified by the gods. The people's poor attitude towards political participation creates avenues that facilitate manipulations of electoral processes characteristic of what is paraded as democracy in Africa.

To sum it up, democracy cannot thrive through manipulated elections or rubber-stamp parliaments as in Africa today. What Africa must achieve to be truly democratic includes:

Its political structure must be based on a multiparty system devoid of incessant cross carpeting; Its elections must be free, frequent and fair in order to ensure the consent of the governed; Its judiciary must be independent and impartial; fundamental civil liberties and political rights of individuals must be protected; and individuals must grow above ethno-religious sentimentalities

However, there is no how Africa can achieve all these without a paradigm shift in its political disposition away from what obtained in traditional African settings in which these fundamental ingredients of democracy were virtually absent.

Conclusion

This essay identifies that democracy in Africa is at variance with ideal democracy. It holds that misplacement of democratic principles in Africa has had a lot of negative impacts on the continent. It acknowledges that there is general democratic recession but maintains that Africa's case is not that of recession as true democracy has never blossomed on the continent. It attributes the inability of germination of ideal democracy on the continent to African cosmology which ill-predisposed the holders to the rudiments of democracy; this is coupled with the fact of imposition of liberal democracy on Africa without the cultural intercourse that characterizes true cultural exchange.

Consequently, democracy is practiced in Africa with the political mind set rooted in African cosmology which incorporates almost none of the essential ingredients of

true democracy such as equality of all, separation of powers, periodic elections, sovereignty of the people etc. The implication of this is that Africa is ill-prepared for democracy. This explains the ills of democracy in Africa. Therefore, democracy in Africa will continue to be in jeopardy until the initial dialogue of give and take between African cosmology and democracy takes place. It is the duty of African scholars to fashion out the pathway of this dialogue. Africa must be ready to shed off some of its fundamental beliefs and attitudes and democracy must be made to recognize some cultural peculiarities. Until this fundamental exchange is done, we will continue to lament the failure of democracy in Africa.

Bibliography

- Acemoglu, Daron and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: the Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, London: Profile Books Ltd, 2012.
- Agundu, Oliver T., *Social and Political Philosophy in the Age of Globalization*, Abuja: DonAfrique Publishers, 2019.
- Campbell, John and Nolan Quinn, "What's Happening to Democracy in Africa?" *African Program*, Council on Foreign Relations (2021), <https://www.cfr.org/article/whats-happening-democracy-africa> Accessed: 15 October, 2023.
- Campion, Nicolas, "The Importance of Cosmology in Culture: Contexts and Consequences" in Abraao Capistrano, *Trends in Modern Cosmology*, 2017, DOI: 10.5772/67976
- Fukuyama, Francis, *The Origin of Political Order*, London: Profile Books Ltd, 2012.
- Greenberg, Edward S., *The Struggle for Democracy*, USA: Longman, 2002.
- Idjakpo, O. G. and J.A. Aigbodioh "The Philosophy of Ujamaa and the African Predicament", *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy* 2009, 2 No.1, 112-126.

Mazrui, Ali, *The Africans – A Triple Heritage*, (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1986.

Odey, John O., *This Madness called Election 2003*, Enugu: Snaap Press, 2003.

Oguejiofor, Josephat Obi, *Philosophy and the African Predicament*, Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2001.

Uwalaka, Jude, *The Struggle for an Inclusive Nigeria: the Igbo to be or not to be?* Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 2003.