

EXPLORING THE RELEVANCE OF YORUBA TRADITIONAL THOUGHT IN THE QUEST FOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

ADEBAYO ADEKUNLE MOSES (NCE, B.A, M.A,)*

ABSTRACT

Nigeria democratic system faces challenges in ensuring participatory democracy. Meanwhile, Yoruba traditional thought, rich in democratic values remains underexplored. Democracy in Nigeria remains undomesticated. It is a pity that despite over sixty decades of our existence as an independent country, we don't have a 'Nigerianised' democracy. There is a need to explore the alignment between Yoruba traditional values and democratic principles in order to make our democracy in Nigeria to have a sense of identity. There are definitely key principles and values evident in Yoruba traditional institutions such as ogboni society and the ifa priesthood, otito (truth), age group (egbe), iforowero (consultation), iwon (balance and harmony) and eto (orderliness), ise ilu (governance), which emphasize collective decision making, community involvement and accountability. All these values and principles can be used to form a framework to integrate Yoruba traditional thought into Nigeria's democratic system. Then, we will be able to bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and modern democratic systems, so that we can enhance participatory democracy in Nigeria. We have modest ambition too, to contribute to a more inclusive and effective democratic system. At the end, we will be able to have comprehensive understanding of Yoruba traditional thought on participatory democracy.

Key words- Participatory democracy, accountability, decision-making, ifa priesthood, ogboni society.

INTRODUCTION

There are several times and occasions in human life when we are confronted with a persistent difficulty in deciding what course of action to take in solving a particular problem. The quest for participatory democracy has been a longstanding and contentious issue with various stakeholders advocating for more inclusive representative system of governance. Amidst the Western-style democratic frameworks, the relevance of indigenous knowledge system and traditional thought has often been overlooked. In our search for political solution, There is one fundamental, ethical cum metaphysical question that is behind and in front of all our considerations. What ought we to do? At least, this presupposes the fact that we have capacity and potential to locate our problems and to pursue or swim against the tide and current of dogmatism for progressive and positive results.

The rich cultural heritage and philosophical underpinnings of Yoruba traditional thought offer a unique perspective on participatory democracy, one that prioritizes communal values, social justice and collective well-being of the people. The exploration here seeks to excavate the relevance of Yoruba traditional thought in the pursuit of participatory democracy in Nigeria. It examines the conceptual framework cultural practices and philosophical principles that undergird Yoruba traditional society, this enquiry aims to uncover the potential contributions of indigenous knowledge to the development of a more inclusive participatory and culturally resonant democratic system in Nigeria.

Ultimately, this paper endeavors to facilitate a nuanced understanding of the intersections between the traditional thought and modern democratic ideals with a view to enriching the ongoing conversations about the democratic governance and development in Nigeria.

We cannot deny the fact that despite over six decades Nigeria has existed as an independent country, she is still battling with moral decadence which has given birth to injustice, materialism, the cult of mediocrity, official corruption, economic slavery, political immaturity, lust for power and intolerance. We do not need any soothsayer to know that with these problems in place, participatory democracy is a camouflage and sophistry of highest order.

At the root of all these problems, according to Oguejiofor (2001), is prejudiced and preconceived notion that must be displaced if Nigeria is going to have meaningful development. Perhaps, if we have listened to the clarion call of Frantz Fanon, who warned us about the flag independence our colonial master gave us then, we would not have been in this political quagmire. Tunji Oyeshile (1999), quoted Frantz Fanon to have said “comrade let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institution and societies which draw their inspiration from her..... If we wish to live up to our people’s expectation we must seek response elsewhere than in Europe”. As far as we are concerned, there is nowhere else to go to than back to our traditional thought.

Tradition is a powerful tool of interpreting reality and existence of man. “Tradition is not something one can learn: not a thread one can pick when he feels like it; any more than a man choose his own ancestor”. For man to evaluate his stand or to return to himself and to have a full awareness of himself, he must return to his traditions and value. (Nwoko, 1985, p.32).

The analytic logical procedures of seeing democracy in the form of individualism is defective. This has inherent problem of abstractionism. The negative effect is noticeably resonant in the low level of valuation of life. Yoruba social traditional thought is based on ontological communion among beings of all levels. The communion has a moral dimension which should regulate the practical judgment of individual person in the society. The goodness or evil of moral action has not only social effect but it is also believed to have metaphysical and physical effect. Yoruba ethical system is a metaphysical ethics in one sense, where an individual takes into consideration the community of vital forces in deciding the goodness or evil of his proper actions. There is no doubt that the value will have positive effect on democratic governance. It is the modest ambition of this paper as has been stated above to show clearly that there are existence of democratic values in Yoruba society that can be used to inform the existing democratic paradigm, following point of argument that discussion of equality and freedom are essential to democracy.

THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY, HUMAN TRADITION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Democracy as a system of government has become an important parameter to measure good governance, development and acceptability in the comity of nations. Democracy is a form of government in which all people have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives. Ideally, this includes equal participation in the proposal, development of passage of legislation into law. It can also encompasses social, economic and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practices of political self-determination. It empowers the people to exercise political control, limits the power of the head of state, provides for the separation of powers, etc. (Longley 2021).

There two basic forms of democracy, they are direct and indirect democracy. Direct democracy takes place when you can easily meet to discuss issues relating to your organization, thereby makes law and vote on various proposal. Indirect democracy takes place when the members of a society vote for leaders to represent them in the decision making process and even in implementing those decisions. (Lisa Cornali 2023, p.3). Moreover, the essentials features of democratic government is that it governs through discussion instead by force. When the discussion has gone to a level that there is no agreement, when

some people are unpersuaded, a vote is taken and the majority decision is followed instead of resorting to force. In democracy, heads are counted instead of breaking it. Democracy empowers the people to exercise the political control, limits the power of head of state, among other functions. (Longley 2021, www.thoughtco.com). In democracy people are allowed to participate in decision making process, either directly or indirectly.

Democracy is not an end itself but a mean to an end. Democracy is a tool used in rearranging social political space, so that it can be of benefit to the individuals in the society by leading to their development. Democracy can contribute to Nigeria socio-economic transformation, political stability and more global influence, the moment it starts to guarantee accountability, foster economic development, protect human rights, ensure political stability, empower citizens, combat corruption advance social justice, foster regional integration support sustainable development and enhance international cooperation. The clarification of different models of democracy by Barker (2002) is worth noting, ranging from the authoritative model, juridical model, pluralist model, unitary and strong models. The authoritative model focuses on centralized power based on the excellence of governing elites, but it is representative because of its accountability to the electorates that select it. The juridical model is marked by protection of the rights of citizens through instrumentality of an independent judicial system. Pluralist democracy resolves problems through bargaining and exchange around individuals who are free and equal. Direct democracy on its own has two forms which are unitary and strong. Essentially, the former is marked by consensus, while the latter is marked by populist bias of participation.

Participatory democracy is a process emphasizing the broad participation of constituents in the direction and operation of political system. Adegboye (2013, p. 204). Etymological roots of democracy implies that the people are in power and therefore, all democracy are participatory. However, participatory democracy tends to advocate more involved forms of citizen participation than traditional representative democracy. Participatory democracy strive to create opportunities for all members of a political group to make meaningful contribution to decision making and seeks to broad the range of people who have access to such opportunities. It involves the extent to which people influence decision which affects their lives. Participatory democracy entails re-constructiveness cum constant evolution. (Negedu 2015, p.304).

According to Laura Trappett (2023), there are benefits of participatory democracy, it is a model of democracy that can be used to counter balancing unequal power. It is a useful to deal with ethical dilemmas and difficult decisions. It provides vital tool for innovation and collective decision making. The citizens are provided with the access to influence policy making process. Participatory democracy enables citizens to participate in decision making process, thereby exercising their sovereignty. Through democratic institutions and processes, citizens can shape the policies and laws that govern their lives, ensuring that the state remains accountable to its people.

Participatory democracy totally encapsulates the idea that sovereignty belongs to the people. In a standard model of representative democracy, representatives make policy decisions and citizens approve or disapprove such policy choices in their future elections. According to Igwe (2010), the participation in government affairs lift the individual above the narrow circles of his egoism and broaden his interest. The United Kingdom to leave the EU (brexit) has raised questions about the relationship between democracy and sovereignty. Some argue that Brexit represents a reassertion of British sovereignty, while others see as a threat to democratic values. (Hobolt 2016, p. 1261). The increasing importance of global governance has raised questions about the limit of national sovereignty. Some argue that global governance requires a redefinition of sovereignty, while others see it as a threat to democratic self-governance. It is also intertwined with the increasing importance of global governance and digital technologies requires a redefinition of sovereignty and its relationship to democracy. Democracy and sovereignty must be

balanced to ensure that power is held by the people and that the state remains accountable to its citizens. (Slaughter 2017, p. 35)

Maveen Kaura (2018), posits that human tradition refers to the customs, beliefs, values, practices and cultural expressions that are passed down from one generation to another, within a group or society. All those shared experiences, knowledge and wisdom that shape a community's identity and inform its behavior. Tradition includes cultural heritage like language, music and art, social norms and values, etc. Human traditions are very important for sense of identity, cultural continuity, social cohesion and cooperation, adaptability, etc. By understanding and respecting human traditions, we can promote inclusivity, foster community engagement, support cultural preservation and heritage and inform sustainable development and social order. Development and its usage in contemporary social sciences disciplines is not only vague and nebulous but also polemical. That is the reason Alain Birou (1977) quoted van Nieuwenhize to have said 'it is preferable to work upon the realization that development is something like variable; a complex notion with variable meanings, indeed with different meaning according to who, or which groups use it, when and where. Attempt have been made by some scholars too define development especially in terms of expansion of industries, wide range of goods that are manufactured in the country, construction of highways, flyover, Gross National Product continue to rise together with establishment of schools, hospitals and hotels etc. In other words, in terms of increase in the productivity of people as a result of exploitation of their environment for the betterment of their lives. This is much of economic sense.

Defining development in this way have received criticism from scholars specially Philosophers. Development to these scholars is a multi-dimensional process involving the totality of man in his political economic, psychological and social relationship among others. Moreover, growth should not be mistaken for development. Development unlike growth, implies the idea of organic change, a process which is not confined to reinforcement of technical power, which on its own could not have economic growth that lend itself to quantitative measurement. Growth alone without any distribution of goods and services, without any distribution of power cannot be called development. In true sense of the word, development. According to Pius Okigbo (1987), development is anything required by man for his being in his many dimension for him to fulfil himself as a member of society, as a homo-economicus, as a politician and as religious man at work and at play. For the development to be a true development, it must be national in outlook.

According to Lant Picthett (2021), National development refers to the process of improving the economic, social, political and cultural well-being of a nation, enhancing the quality of life for its citizens, thereby creating a more prosperous, just sustainable society. It encompasses economic growth, poverty reduction, political stability, social justice, etc. National development is a continuous and dynamic process that requires the collective efforts of government, civil society private sector and citizens to achieve a prosperous and sustainable future for all.

The national development must promote human dignity. The ultimate aim is the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population on the basis of its full participation in the process of improving well-being and fair distribution of the benefits. Citizen's livelihoods must be enhanced. It also target promotion of social equity and inclusivity. National development also has its focus on strengthening institutions and governance, protect the environment and natural resources. Finally, national development cultivate a sense of national identity and pride. (2021-2025 Nigerian National development plan www.nationalplanning.gov.ng)

We support the fact that for development to have a meaning at all, it must be for liberation of humanity from three evils of ignorance, wants (poverty) and squalor (poor living conditions). It must help man to realize his full potentials, participate in government intelligently. Ignorance pertaining to lack of knowledge, education, and critical thinking skills. It can perpetuate inequality, limit opportunities, and hinder social mobility. According to UNESCO (2020), 258 million children and youth are out of school worldwide, highlighting persistent challenge of ignorance. A report by the World Bank (2020), notes that improving education quality and access can help reduce income and inequality and promote economic growth.

Poverty is a multidimensional issue that encompasses not only income but also access to basic service, healthcare and social protection. The World Bank (2020) estimates 736 million people live in extreme poverty worldwide, struggling to meet their basic needs. A report by the United Nations Development Programme (2020) highlights the importance of addressing poverty and inequality to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Squalor refers to poor living conditions, including inadequate housing, sanitation and healthcare. According to the World Health organization (2020), 2 billion people worldwide lack access to basic sanitation facilities and 673 million people practice open defecation. A report by Habitat for Humanity (2020) notes that 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing highlighting the need for affordable and decent housing. Addressing the three evils of ignorance requires a comprehensive a holistic approach that prioritizes education, poverty reduction and improved living conditions.

Participatory democracy, human traditions and national development are interconnected with one another with each reinforcing the others. Human traditions shape national cultural identities, in the process, influencing democratic values and practices. The three align to cause inclusive decision making and community engagement. Human tradition instill values like respect, fairness and accountability, which also underpin participatory democracy and ethical national development. Likewise in the area of social cohesion, both participatory democracy and human tradition foster it and it becomes a platform for stable and prosperous national development strategies. The next section will look at the current situation in Nigeria.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN NIGERIA DEMOCRACY

It is unfortunate that despite all the attention that democracy has attracted to itself in Nigeria, it is still a long crawl from the twilight of rule by military juntas into a new form of democratic tyranny that lies between anarchy and democracy. The danger we still face is to the effect that representative democracy had been impossible in political government. Although we have what we called democratic government but we cannot still boast of democratic governance. Instruments of social control are still handled with sense of crudity to create false obedience to illegitimate socio-order.

Our democracy is seriously battling with patrimonial syndrome, which makes our leaders to distribute goods and services among friends and family members to the detriment of an entire nation. There are therefore patron-client and godfather – godson relationships, where by leaders exchange favour in reciprocity to a group of followers. According to Isaiah Ngedu (2015), there is extractive institution, which constitutes elites that design economic institutions to enrich themselves. Wealth of many individuals are as a result of this process in Nigeria

Our democracy is still having difficulty in grappling with the fact that democratization does not solely depend on the creation of the basic institutions of the democracy but to a large extent the creation of right environment for the institution to function. According to Dipo Irele (1993), until representatives and electorates become equal stake holders, democracy in Nigeria will never be a true vehicle for genuine

development. Many scholars have derided Nigeria as a lame leviathan and sleeping giant. In their analysis, Nigeria crises are as a result of socio-cultural configuration. Nnoli (1989), posited that the divisive tendency to the socio-cultural plurality, especially the way we were chaotically crammed within political space called Nigerian state is the reason for our woes.

While we agree with these scholars to certain extent, we still believe that ethnic, religious, linguistic and other socio-cultural or primordial factors that have formed the basis for the crystallization of our identity in Nigeria are mere manifestation of a more fundamental problem. The failure of the state to engender in the citizens the feeling that existing socio-order is the most appropriate for the people. For this reason, many Nigerians have resulted to parochial cleavages when participating in democratic activities. According to Adegboye (2013), there is a political challenge of politics of exclusion and the creation of a society of unequal. This has led to recycling of political old cargoes and their kleptomaniac godsons. The resultant effect is paradox of Islands of poverty in a sea of riches.

Likewise, there is still a challenge of ensuring a democratic divided for women, youth, disabled and ethnic minorities. Nigeria women are still at lower rung of political ladder. More or less political handbags in spite of many conferences and United Nation resolutions urging all countries to pay attention to their status and roles. Our youths continue to be largely illiterate, unemployed and disillusioned. According to Chris Uroh (2007), underneath the political crisis rocking our political boat is delegitimisation of African past and resultant cultural dislocation. The severance of link with our cultural roots has led to displacement of African traditional values. There is serious devaluation of our personality as a result of imposition of alien paradigm. We need to interrogate this prevailing foreign values with responsive communitarianism and African traditional thoughts so that our democracy can become a strong platform for our national development.

YORUBA TRADITIONAL THOUGHT IN THE QUEST FOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA.

There is no doubt that western democracy which we have adopted as a system of government has been predicated on individualist theory of citizenship. Individualism as a concept, emphasizes the autonomy and absolute moral worth of each individual. It demands freedom in every sphere of life, intellectual, social, religious, political and moral, for the individual to serve his interest and develop his potentialities as a rational human being.

Moreover, many theories of socio political thoughts have motivated variants of individualism. They have all taken interest of individuals to be basic to political obligations. This is true of the theories of utilitarianism of right and social contract. Jeremy Bentham can be regarded as the first advocate of this social political thought called utilitarianism. According to him, nature has placed mankind under the government of sovereign master: pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do. By principle of utility he meant that principle which appears to have in increasing or diminishing happiness of the parts whose interest is in question. Jeremy Bentham (1986).

According to Jeremy Bentham, the interest of the community is one of the most general expressions that can occur in the phraseology of morals. But community is a fictitious body, compose of the individuals who are considered of consulting its members. The interest of the several members who compose it. J.S Mill in an attempt to modify Jeremy Bentham's principle introduced qualitatively lower and higher forms of pleasure to the initial calculus that Bentham has given. In his essay *On Liberty* he says the only justification for interfering with individual liberty is the prevention of harm to others. Rights are power of acting for one's ends secured for an individual by the community on the supposition that it contributes to

the goods of the community. According to Baker (1985), it is the external conditions necessary for the greatest possible development of the capacities of the personality. The doctrine of right qualifies as an individualist theory because it takes individual interest as the basic raw material for justifying a social practice.

Theory of right is quite similar to utilitarianism. The only modification is that the doctrine of rights recognizes unlike utilitarianism at least in principle that certain interest are fundamental and cannot be sacrificed on any ground even if doing so will promote “the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.” Social contract theory is also a variant of the individualist principle. It rest on the assumption that any political association of individuals must be justified by reference to the interest of that individual. An individual is believed to be the source of his interest; he has to give his consent to any institution established for this purpose. We see version of social contract theory so far back as Plato, but its most noteworthy classical proponents were Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, J.J. Rousseau. In our time, John Rawls has proposed a new intriguing version which has attracted a lot of criticism and commendations from scholars across the globe.

Communitarianism have sought to deflate the universal pretension of liberal theory. Communitarians argue that standard of justice must be found in form of life and traditions of particular societies and hence can vary from context to context Alasdair Macintyre (1993, p.446). Certain core argument meant to contrast with liberalism devaluation of community recurs in the works of communitarians. One can distinguish between claims of three sorts: methodological which concerns with the importance of tradition and social context for moral and political reason, the ontological claim which is about social nature of self and normative claim is about the value of community. One thing communitarian’s fear most is the atomized, alienated and mass society of mutually antagonistic individual easy to overcome by despotism. Responsive communitarianism according to Amitai Etzioni (1998), assumes that a “good society” is based on a carefully crafted balance between liberty and social order, between individual right and social responsibilities, between particularistic (ethnic, racial and communal) and social values likewise, bonds. In that sense far from representing an individualist model. The communitarian good societies combines Asian values (also reflecting tenets of Islam and Judaism that stress social responsibilities) with a Western concern, political liberty and individual rights. After all, to this thought system, individuals are embodied agents in the world.

There is no doubt that certain practices in Yoruba traditional society meet the core argument of communitarianism. The conception of personhood which was held in traditional Yoruba society differs from the individualist type. The historical origin of this individualist humanism can be traced to Protagoras ‘man is the measure of all things’. This implies the elimination of supernatural to explain the “WHY, WHAT and HOW” of things. Individualist humanism wants man to rely on observation, logic and reason. Although there are indeed human achievements in science and technology that rely on this conception, there are also aberrations of chemical and biological wars.

Unlike Cartesian dualism, human kind and nature are one in Yoruba moral order and this has profound correlation on its social political thought. To Yoruba, massive injection of capital cannot guarantee real economic and social development of man without adequate attention giving to moral ends. It is a conception that focuses on the fact that man must maintain good relationship with dead ancestors, gods, God and other men in a society for him to be happy. Achieving the status of personhood is conditional on social achievement and contribution to the common good. Yoruba will say, *oruko rere san ju wura ati fadaka lo* (good name is better than silver).

According to placid Temple (1998), Bantus see person as a communal being. The idea of separate being of substance which find themselves side by side entirely independent of one another is foreign to Bantu thought Mbiti (1990) in concurring, posits that in traditional African life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. The individual can only say ‘I am because we are and since we are I am’ instead of ‘cogito ergo sum’ (I think, therefore I exist) of Rene Descartes. This value is also seen in Yoruba, there is Yoruba adage, ‘enikan kii je kile fe’ (one person cannot eat and you will expect expansion).

In refuting the argument that almighty community crushed individuals in traditional societies, Segun Gbadegesin (1981) says ‘individualism does not thrive in traditional African societies because of orientation’. He goes further to posits that community does not force itself on an unyielding individual socialization that individuals passed through enable them to experience love and concern as well as internalize virtues of community. These virtues guide their actions concerning others. If individual uniqueness were not recognized he asks how could such powerful figures such as Kurunmi, Latoosa, Obokun and Moremi became charismatic leaders.

In Yoruba communities like many other places in African society indigenous values of fellow facing, solidarity and cooperation feature prominently in the economic activities of individuals. Thus, there are owe and *aro*, cooperative endeavors in which people help one another on a specific task. ‘I am because we are’ becomes an understandable and reasonable expression of dependence, which does not entail suppression. Community in Yoruba is divided in terms of age and gender classes. This provides a framework for orderly status distribution and interaction. For example, when a beast is slaughtered the carved portions are distributed according to the prescription of status classification. This a cleared demonstration social equity.

Social responsibility is expressed, by harvesting only part of the crop and leaving the rest to less privilege, the poor, orphan, destitute and eventually to the birds. In Yoruba land, farmers will roast either yam or maize and leave it beside their farm for any passer by that is hungry to eat. Nature conservation has a definite place in the system and is based on internal communitarian ethics.

Yoruba traditional society respect the role that elders play in the Yoruba traditional society. They believe that elders have more to offer by way of knowledge, experience, personal influence and power. Yoruba will say ‘*Bomode Laso bi agba ko le ni Akisa bi agba*’ (If a young man has clothes like elders, he cannot have old and worn out clothes like elders). Another one says ‘*Enu agba lobi ti ngbo*’ (It is in the mouth of elders that kolanut become mature). Kolanut here connote words. It means words of elders are full of wisdom.

Nevertheless, Yoruba traditional society also value and appreciate the relevant roles played by youths or young people, especially in terms of contributing their own opinions to the decision-making process. Yoruba will say ‘*Bomode o jobi agba o joye*’ (if youths are denied kolanut, elder cannot become chief). As we have noted earlier kola here can mean having a say in decision making process of the community. Yoruba tradition emphasizes the important roles play by young people for example, Yoruba people have adages, ‘*Omode gbon agba gbon lafi da ile-ife*’ (children are wise, elders are wise, contributed to the founding of Ife town), ‘*Ówo omode koto pepe tagbalagba kowo kengbe*’ (children hands do not reach barn, elders hands do not enter gourd). The meaning is that children need elders to take anything from barn. Likewise, elders too need children to take anything inside gourd.

What this boils down to is that Yoruba traditional society embodies a tradition of consultation (*iforowero*) with decision making by everybody in the society. Decision by consensus was often the order of the day

in Yoruba tradition. There is general interpersonal relationship among adults, consensus is a basic factor for joint action. It is called *iforowero* (consultation). There is a proverb that goes with this, '*otun wo, osi wo, oun ta aba jijo wo, diduro nii duro*' (when left look at it and right look at it, the outcome will stand strongly)

Segun Gbadegesin (1981), posits that there is no need for any tension between individuality and community since it is possible for an individual freely to give his/her own perceived interest for the survival of the community. But in giving up one's interest thus, one is also sure that the community will not disown one and that one's well-being will be its concern. Yoruba traditional society did not oppose the doctrine of rights and respect for human dignity. Individual rights are natural, very fundamental attributes of human person which cannot be neutralized by communal structure that value socio order. However, the Yoruba traditional socio ethical thought did not make fetish of rights. Duties instead of rights are in the fore front of its concern and preoccupation.

The reason why there are few millionaires in Yoruba traditional societies is because Yoruba people values give no room to excessive material accumulation as a result of rights. There was acceptance that whatever one person had in the way of basic necessities, they had all. No one could go hungry while others hoarded food, and no one could be denied shelter, if others had space to spare, the economic level of one person could never get too out of proportion to the economic level of others.

Ogboni society counterbalances the authority of the king, reducing king's arbitrary decisions. The *ogboni* society mediates in disputes through traditional means. Apart from spiritual guidance that the *ifa* priests provide in Yoruba land, *ifa* priests embody moral integrity. They influence rulers and the citizens to make ethical decisions. They hammer on *otito* (truth) as hallmark of *iselu* (governance). Democracy is all about good governance needs these values to become tool for the well-being of the individuals in any country. Together, the two traditional institutions of *ogboni* and *ifa* priesthood ensure accountability, by holding rulers accountable for their actions, thereby preventing abuse of power. They maintain balance, because power is distributed among various stakeholders. They also prevent tradition, making the tradition is passed down through generation. In brevity, the two institutions promote responsible governance, which is the hallmark of democracy.

In conclusion, socio ethical thought of Yoruba community still allows flowering of individual dignity and development, despite strong communal structure.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

This exploration of the relevance of Yoruba traditional thought in the quest for participatory democracy in Nigeria has revealed the rich cultural heritage and philosophical underpinnings of Yoruba society. By examining the conceptual frameworks, cultural practices and philosophical principles that undergird Yoruba traditional society, this paper has demonstrated the potential contributions of indigenous knowledge to the development of a more inclusive, participatory and culturally resonant democratic system in Nigeria.

The findings of this study suggest that Yoruba traditional thought offers valuable insights into the importance of communal values, social justice and collective well-being of the people. The principle of prioritization of common good are particularly relevant in the context of participatory democracy. Moreover, this study has highlighted the need for a more nuanced understanding of the intersections between the traditional thought and modern democratic ideals. There is no doubt, application of the principles will improve participatory in Nigeria.

Based on the findings of this paper, we recommend the incorporation of Yoruba traditional thought into the frameworks of Nigerian democratic system. The policy makers should explore ways of making the Yoruba thought serves in the areas of communal decision making, social justice and the prioritization of common good. Efforts should also be geared towards promoting cultural revival and awareness among Nigerians, particularly younger generation. This can be achieved through education, cultural festivals and community programmes.

Moreover, community based initiatives that promote participatory democracy and social justice should be supported and encouraged. This can include community development projects and cooperatives and social movements. We also suggest interdisciplinary research and collaboration between scholars, policymakers and community leaders to explore the relevance of Yoruba traditional thought in the quest for participatory democracy in Nigeria.

Finally, we suggest as a matter of urgency that Nigeria should strive to develop context-specific democratic models that take into account the country's unique cultural, historical and philosophical heritage. This can involve drawing on Yoruba traditional thought and other indigenous knowledge systems to create a more inclusive and participatory democratic system.

***ADEBAYO ADEKUNLE MOSES (NCE, B.A, M.A.)**
DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL STUDIES,
McPherson University, Seriki Sotayo Village, Ogun State.
Adekunleadebayo358@gmail.com
08027808599, 07051646511

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