
REIMAGINING AFRICAN DEMOCRACY: BETWEEN THE GRASS AND THE GLASS HOUSES*

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Abstract

Democracy has been the cornerstone of modern governance systems in Africa for several decades. However, its full implementation and sustainability on the continent has been challenging, with many nations facing unique contextual issues. This paper highlights the internal and external pressures in African governance systems to the fragility and vulnerability African democracies. The paper examines the challenges and opportunities of democratic consolidation in Africa, proposing a framework for evolving an African democracy that is resilient, adaptive, and responsive to the needs of African citizens. The paper concludes that, African democracies require a paradigm shift, one that prioritizes context-specific solutions, cultural relevance, and inclusive participation. By rethinking Western-centric models of democracy, the paper seeks to contribute to the development of more resilient and sustainable democratic systems that balances cultural heritage with modern democratic values.

Keywords: Democracy, Governance, African Values, Indegenous Democracy, Grass House, Glass House.

Introduction

Democracy like every concept in common use is vague. It not only admits a variety of interpretations, it is also ambiguous. There is the populist and polyarchal interpretations of Robert Darhi as against Giovanni Satori and J.S. Schumpeter's¹ elective polyarchal and a device for providing leadership respectively.

In Africa, and for Africans, democracy carries the toga of consensus leadership a people originated and oriented regime that instigates the common good. This essay critiques this traditional conception of democracy as the directing principle of governance system in Africa and argues that democracy has undergone several changes in form and character deviating from its essential meaning and abandoning its content which views “the people” as the ultimate sovereign

* The metaphor of *grass houses* and *glass houses* signifies the complexity of African Democracies. It reflects the African values, resilience and solidarity to withstand undemocratic challenges. By embracing traditional values, modern democratic principles and community engagement, Africa can evolve a unique paradigm of democracy that is resilient, transparent and accountable.

¹. Giovanni Satori and J.S. Schumpeter's 1974: 100-102

in whose name the authority every official act is performed. The essay further challenges the ensuing neo-democratic culture which allows the rich and the influential powerful elite (the Glass Houses) to manipulate the reins of power, without regard to the rule of law, observance of human rights and due regard to human needs. Such, it is argued in this paper, is power without responsibility and accountability. We argue the conclusion that, sustainability of democracy in a distressed nation like Nigeria is a product of good governance anchored on the religio-cultural values of “the people”, the ruled.

Rethinking the Concept of Democracy

Democracy like most concepts is vague though, its Greek derivation *demos* denotes the citizens body, the common people or the lower orders of society i.e. the poor people who for the purpose of this essay are referred to as the Grass Houses. The Encyclopedia of philosophy defines *demos* as the rule of or system of government that invest power in the people, directly or through elected representatives. The metaphor of "grass houses and glass houses" is a powerful one, illustrating the delicate balance between vulnerability and resilience in democratic systems. Grass houses, made from natural materials, are fragile and susceptible to environmental factors, while glass houses, made from glass, are brittle and prone to breakage. Similarly, democratic institutions in Africa can be fragile and vulnerable to various challenges, requiring careful nurturing and adaptation to survive. It suffices to state here that, this understanding of democracy is nothing but a reaction to elitist and aristocratic rule as much as plutocracy (Government by the rich) and the likes. It should be noted though, that, this traditional understanding of democracy is a contradiction in terms of the simple fact that the basic principle of equality inherent in humanity is absent in this leadership device. However, the modern conception of democracy renounces sectional rule of any kind. Democracy is neither for the common man nor the elites alone but for all. “The people's rule” which the Greeks have envisaged represents majority rule created out of the city states concept to mean a form of government in which every person, and all citizens partake in decision making in the hope of advancing the common good of all within a state structure. This concept of democracy no doubt informs the definition of Abraham Lincoln² as “the government of the people, by the people and for the people”.

Upon analysis, this conception of democracy is inadequate on the justifiable ground that, all government are of the people, and even a benevolent oligarch such as the military could claim to be for the people. Similarly, leadership that results from a stolen mandate could pronounce itself as originating from popular choice of the people. It goes to say therefore that there is more to democracy than Abraham Lincoln's definition. Ideally, democracy entails, the rational participation of every individual human being in social, economic and political matters of the society. This conception of democracy is founded on the assumption of the basic tenets of

² Abraham Lincoln as quoted from Stori G. *Democracy Theory*, New York, F.A.Praeger Inc. 1965: p. 26

democracy, that all human beings are free, equal and have interests in bringing about a society worth living in, and dying for.

But still, the question of what democracy means to the poor and the rich remains an issue for clarification. For us here, democracy entails a popular self government which Ayo Fadahunsi³ explains is the participation of each individual in the decision making process in which every individual has equal say irrespective of status and in which disagreements are settled by majority vote.

This is direct democracy as against indirect democracy whose representatives are elected by the people to participate in decision making process on behalf of the ruled (the grass) as against the ruling class (the grass). Here understood, the principal quality of democracy is self government which process, the ruled rules itself where everyone participates in the decision making process through discussion and vote in a face to face manner on all issues of common importance. The Athenian Greece, which is a paradigm of this understanding of democracy explains this system of governance in a maxim that:

If a democratic decision is thought of as a result of fair confrontation of opinions, it must at best be generally agreed upon and at worst be agreed upon by the majority⁴

It thus means that, direct democracy of the Athenian Greece stands dissolved while representative democracy is elevated in its place with the concept of the people modifies to mean majority of the people as opposed to the whole people and every individual in decision making process. It must be noted as a point of importance that no amount of represent can equal direct participation because the geography of our nation state as presently constituted does not allow majority rule in a direct way as in Athens. We can only say that representative democracy; a system of government in which all the people of a country can vote to elect their representatives must be based on the generally accepted tenets of freedom, equality and the rule of law. In essence, every democracy must guarantee the equality and freedom of all human beings and their liberty to pursue their interest unhindered and the subjection of all to the supremacy of the law. The question at issue here is whether these democratic ideals have found practical expression in modern day African democracies.

African Democracies and the Triumph of Evil

It may not out be of place to say that African democracy is nothing but footnotes of colonial rule in Africa. It remains to be said that, the history of democracy in Africa is the history colonial rulers

³. Fadahunsi, A, "Democracy" Definition, Forms and the Nigerian Experience" in Muyiwa Falaiye (ed) Africa's Political stability: Ideas, values and questions, Lagos, Panaf Publishing Inc. 1999:217

⁴. Graham. K., The battle of Democracy, Brighton, Wheat Sheat Book Ltd, 1986, p. 19

in Africa. Today in Africa there is fire in Zimbabwe burning everybody without exception. There is serious trouble in Nigeria in form of herdsmen militia, banditry and ethnic insurgency that have combined to ruining the guilty and the innocent. Burundi and Rwanda, Cameroon and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Africa and Niger, Sudan, Burkina-Faso and Senegal among others are engaged in one form of crises or the other with attendant refugee problems and each of these countries is in want of a return of the country in question to a genuine democratic political order. Most African countries (including Nigeria) practice democracy though, freedom, the rule of law, human rights and social justice which together define genuine democracy are essentially lacking, and control of political power is done to the disadvantage of those to whom it is held in trust.

In contemporary Africa, democracy has experienced drastic changes compared to earlier times. Political parties and individuals have refused to learn from the past and to create and leave a worthy legacy for the future. The overbearing stance taken by political in African today tend to institutionalize partisan factors and exacerbate a spiral of confrontations with one another. It is in our own Nigeria that a sitting party chairman of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), Chief Vincent Ogbulafor showed his true color as an enemy of the democratic process by saying that the PDP was sworn to rule for the next 60 years, and that he did not care if Nigeria becomes a one party state. Earlier, the immediate past chairman of the same political party, Dr. Amadu Ali and the executive members did everything to usurp due process and the rule of law in its bid to hold on to power and retain its status as the ruling party. These and other factors elsewhere in Africa, have played a major role in the development and growth of the pains experienced by popular democracies in Africa. This is aside from the disturbing attitude of the winner takes all syndrome in Africa that has usurped the balance of power thus creating disharmony in the political system. There is no gain saying that attempts to uphold a democratic system of government under such conditions have in Africa, often led to the ongoing wars, and sadly too, violent options has become the rule rather than the option.

Today in Africa, the basic tenets of democracy have been left to waste in the dust bin of nothingness. Democracy no longer hangs on the people or a collection of individual that propel the engine of rulership but on the rich, the elite and the powerful (Glass Houses) who lord it over the ruled the majority (the Grass Houses) who should rule in the classical sense of the word. This to us means the triumph of evil and the reign Godfatherism. As it were this brand of politics promotes the rich and powerful thereby creating and living survivalist and feudalistic careerism. Democracy is no longer a governance system of the people, by the people and for the people as envisioned in sane civilizations. It is plutocracy, a small coterie of the rich who control political power and the state machinery to the exclusion of the mass population. Here understood democracy no longer entails a *grass-root advanced rule* with a considerable measure of

collective action that promotes and sustains social justice, economic equality and human rights. It no longer presents, itself as a governance structure that allows the ruled to rule itself in the self government with the general view that common good of several person and the whole person is promoted.

Properly put in context, democracy in its classical sense aims at the advancement of the general good. It is a conscious attempt at waging war against human greed, intolerance and corruption. It signposts human development and the good of life that promotes political good, economic independence and virtuous life far removed from the gargantuan paradise of charlantry the African nations, nay contemporary Nigerian has become. A peep into the Nigerian story; a micro Africa reveals that our democratic culture exemplify the evil that took with it stability, leadership and peace, because we are not honest, we are not sincere and that our nation manifest absurdities and contradiction, corruption and criminality in varying degrees and in all facets of its life.

In Nigeria today, corruption has become a legitimate business in government, and opportunities to govern have also been commercialized and put on sale to the rich and their poteges. this institutionalized corruption has affected other areas of human endeavour like the civil service, the police, the Ivory Tower, the banking industry, and even the religious organizations. George Akume as he was then, as the Governor of Benue State, Nigeria at the 2004 University of Ibadan alumni lecture states the issue point blank that corruption is responsible for government's failure to deliver democracy dividends in the country.⁵

Coming from one who should know, the governor's quip implies that corruption in Nigeria breeds inefficiency, diminishes productivity, discourage investments, fuel inflation and capital flight and instates a regime of poverty and unemployment. Nothing can be farther from the truth than to wholly agree with him that corruption is an affront on human conscience, and a negation of the human vocation to inherit here on earth a kingdom of truth and justice.

Nigeria is a society of growing permissiveness and disregard for objective standard of morality, a society of greedy economics and inhuman treatment of the poor, a society where morality has lost much of its transcendental value and largely its bearings. Indeed we are living in a word of moral perversion which has become a new culture built on lust for wealth, apathy, moral laxity, corruption, indiscipline and violence, a world in which the high and low have forgotten that integrity means dignity that is worn like a clothing strongly clad to their essence. Under such a frightening, terrifying and indeed unhealthy political culture, adherence to the rule of law and observance of human rights and dignity of human persons remains a distant dream.

⁵. NewAge, 06-10-2004:19-22

In the field economy, Nigeria is not yet independently independent. Some of the spoils of colonialism that were, passed on the government of Nigeria and are still hunting the nation's economic policies. As rightly pointed out by Nkruma, “colonialism was not act of civilization and was not desired to civilize but a force motivated by self interest and exploitation”⁶

Thus, Nigeria is economically enslaved and her economy has been largely deregulated to the satisfaction Europe and America. Several years after assumptions of self government the then president Olusegun Obasanjo unliterary increased fuel prices six times with promises of improved welfare that were never fulfilled and policies that could not be implemented. the Nigerian Naira has continued to nosedive in favour of international currencies and market forces.

Looking back in history reveals that Africans faired better under colonial rule than under their respective present native imperialist. Today, African elites are stealing money and keeping it abroad. While China had lifted 400,000 people out of poverty in at 20 years. Nigeria had pushed 71 million people below the poverty line⁷ Even the president Olusegun Obasanjo⁸ acknowledged reluctantly though, that, there is poverty in the land thus confirming Nigeria's position as the 151 out 177 countries in the world. While oil producing nations like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Russia, Libya, Scotland, United Arab Emirate, Venezuela and Iran are embarking upon urban renewal, Nigerian oil money is experiencing capital flight in geometric proportion leaving darkness in the land, consulting clinics, unmotorable roads, poverty and disease, infrastructural problems, unemployment and crime in the land.

Political immaturity is another aspect of the Nigerian problem that exhibit the triumph of evil. As a nation of about 250 unequal legs, with a triple cultural heritage, (Islam, Christianity and African religions). Nigeria like many other African countries has managed to contend with her share of political crises. There is to a large extent political instability evidently found in ethnic revelries, labour unrests and punctuated academic calendars, etc. In Northern Nigeria, religion is threatening peaceful co-existence. In the middle-belt the minorities are resisting internal colonization. The south-east fighting marginalization even as the driving the economic engine of the nation. The South West has assumed the enviable position of intellectual holdovers and perfecting ways of ever remaining Nigerians technocrats. In the south – south, the war on resource control and youth restiveness has assumed a tragic dimension with attacks on oil companies. The resultant vandalization of oil facilities and hostage taking points to the fact that the crisis has assumed a frightening level.

The triumph of evil has further complicated the spiritual resource of the nation. Religion has

⁶. Nkruma, N. *Towards Colonial Freedom*, London Panaf Book Ltd. 1962, p. 3

⁷. *Tribune* September 23, 2004: p. 35

⁸. *New Age* November: 11: 2004, *Guardian*, July 27, 2004: p. 33.

become a strong factor in Nigeria politics though, it has to a large extent marred the evolution of a viable and enduring polity. Today in Nigeria, religious bigotry evidenced in the 1980 Maitatsine religious uprising in Kano subsequently spread to Bulumkutu and Jimeta Yola in 1982, Ilorin in 1986, Kafanchan, Kanduna, Sokoto, Bauchi, Kano, Zaria, Malumfashi and Kankia in 1987. In all these upheavals, large scale destruction of property and loss of lives were recorded. The bloody clash between Christians and Muslims at Zangon Kataf and the burning down of churches in Kano and Bauchi at the slightest provocation and the reprisal attacks in the South of Nigeria confirms the rule of evil in the affairs of men in Nigeria and has more than ever complicated the search for a genuine democratic culture.

Obviously, the Nigeria of today is a failed project and its leadership is no less failed leadership whose followership is fast losing patience. In his very words to the then president Obasanjo, Chinua Achebe a renowned novelist and intelligentsia rejected the national honours conferred on him. In his reasoned rebuttal, he says; "Nigeria's condition today under your watch is too dangerous for silence. I must register my disappointment and protest by declining to accept the high honour awarded me in the 2004 Honours List."⁹ The suggestion here is that our hard earned representative democracy is not different from the dictatorship of the past in any material detail. Achebe quips further that,

I have watched particularly the chaos in my own state of Anambra where a small clique of renegades, openly boasting its connections in high places, seems determined to turn my homeland into a bankrupt and lawless fiefdom. I am appalled by the brazenness of this clique and the silence, if not connivance, of the Presidency,¹⁰

The nation's wealth continues to be hands of few rich and powerful, and foreign bank accounts of political elites with all indices of economic and political progress pointing to a downward trend. While our government has ranked several billions of dollars from the sale of crude oil abroad, Nigerians at home are groaning in penury and living without food, good drinking water, health facilities, schools and energy which drive the engine of development. Indeed, Nigerians are being squeezed out of existence in the midst of plenty thus forcing Gani Fawehumi, (SAN) to describe the act as "socially criminal, economically inexplicable and politically wicked and anti-people"¹¹. True to type, Nigeria is today ruled by plutocrats- the rich, a cabal of evil men of ideas, who stray from the right path because their self-knowledge is unreliable. They have failed to distinguish power from property. Nigeria, nay Africa has arrived at a junction in her political life

⁹. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/nov/14/chinua-achebe-refuses-nigerian-national-honour> Accessed on 5th May, 2025

¹⁰. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/nov/14/chinua-achebe-refuses-nigerian-national-honour> Accessed on 5th May, 2025

¹¹. New Watch, October 11, 2004, p. 7

when evil has triumphed over good. A political phase when the plutocrats (Glass Houses) have subdued and substituted an evil regime of simpletons, ignoramuses and the greedy lot who have combined power and property as tool of governance. As it were these leaders in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa suffer from an alarming lack of restraint and organization both in the manner they loot the treasury and the way they enforce discipline within their ranks in government and political parties.

Simply put, our leaders lack the cardinal virtues of patience, humility, charity and industry which together define a person's worth and leadership character. Our leaders have in succession redefined democracy away from popular understanding, and have enthroned democratic rules that militate against the power of ideas and morals. Our story, it must be pathetically told, is a sobering story of a nation infected with HIV and AIDS, it is a miserly nation where arid land, rivers and oceans abound though, food and water are scarce and essential commodities reserved for the rich and the ruling class. Ours, is a country blessed with rare mineral resources though, it is faced with complete economic meltdown, abject poverty, and a vicious and brutal regime whose leaders (Civilians) are concerned more with devious schemes that would enable them hang onto power for life than the welfare of the people. It is a distressed nation in want of ethical regeneration because the grass houses (the ruled) who should act as a check on the glass houses (the rulers) are all corrupt. Power for them has become a tool in the hands of man without leadership knowledge and wisdom; they manipulate it at random and injure themselves (rulers and the ruled) more than they make progress in delivering democracy dividends.

The presumption of the rule of law and the absolute supremacy of the principle of separation of power on which genuine democracy is hinged is daily abused. The science of human conduct which serves as a restraint and a basis for the enforcement of discipline no longer has a pride of place in the affairs of the men and women in our democracy. In African democracies for example, leader equable and disgrace themselves publicly. Treasonable offenses are routinely treated with levity and swept under the carpet and crimes against the state are settled within the ruling party (family) even when the interests of the entire nation could be stake. Whether it is the most profound breaches of the rule of law and serious and serial constitutional infractions committed by the nation's past leaders, or the wanton stealing of state funds and contract inflations by some state governors, the mind – boggling crimes committed in the Power Sector (NEPA) in the eight years of Obasanjo administration as evidenced in the probe panel of the Houses of Representatives, large scale electoral corruption through votes allocation and judicial abracadabra judgments at some tribunals, one thing stand out clearly, that ours leaders, past and present have succeeded in deeping the skepticism among Nigerians that our is nothing but an arrested form of democracy, which political monstrosity has raised in its place a tragic failure of leadership.

What has become clear to us is that, in African democracies, the rail guards of democracy are in retreat and democracy in Africa is facing numerous challenges, including:

- i. Weak Institutions: Many African countries have weak institutions, including judiciaries, parliaments, and electoral commissions, which can undermine democratic governance.
- ii. Corruption: Corruption is a pervasive issue in many African countries, eroding trust in government and democratic institutions.
- iii. Ethnic and Regional Divisions: Africa's diverse ethnic and regional identities can create tensions and conflicts, threatening democratic stability.
- iv. Religious entrepreneurship: political religion that creates division and used as a faith basis identity for empowerment and favours for individuals of same faith
- v. External Interference: External actors, including former colonial powers and international organizations, can influence African democracies, sometimes undermining their sovereignty.

Evolving an African Paradigm:

As cogently argued above, the Nigerian problem is largely encased in moral decadence, economic slavery, political parochialism and religious bigotry. In our efforts to evolve a nation worth living in a dying for serious attempts must be made at addressing these problems. It is argued here that, African knowledge system has the capacity of evolving an enduring society will emerge. Its main function of is to broaden man's vision of life and its problem. Understandable, our indigenous knowledge system becomes a vision which frees our mind set from the biases and prejudices of the unexamined life. Argued as such, indigenous knowledge system liberates our mental magnittitude and so help us to tackle the problem bedeviling Nigeria. For as Russel rightly suggests:

“The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudice derived from common sense, from the habitual belief of his age or his nation and from convictions which have growth up in his mind without the cooperation or consent of his deliberate reason”¹²

Founded on his thinking it may be suggested that African knowledge system embellished in proverbs, religious rituals, songs, aphorisms etc. has the capacity of attacking and toppling the problem bedeviling the Nigeria nation. In Africans songs for instance, all their joys and sorrows, hopes and fears about the future of Africans find their outlets. African use songs as vehicles of conveying sentiments and existential needs are conveyed through rituals by worshipper for the resolution of their problems of present and the hereafter. This Metaphysical approach to existential threats suggest that African episteme offer a viable alternative approach to sustainable humanity which for African is in perfect alliance with both the material (body) and spiritual (soul)

^{12.} Russell, B., *Truth and Fiction*, London, George & Unwin Ltd. 1998, p. 91

spheres of man.

Here, we are referring to the interplay of social economic, political and religious activities in which, though regulated by man is sourced by God who demand justice and morality based on equity. This in itself calls for a new philosophy of looking at life in which in, every human decision, values must upheld. This is, the philosophy of the morality of human integration. A morality in which people are conscious of their activities as rational activities and their implications. Guided by this philosophy, which is basically African in form and structure, Africans will become generally aware of a certain need to evaluate their actions against their rational source in humankind itself, thus bringing out morally responsible citizens and good government.

Similarly, religious rituals and myths can be a large extent contribute to the evolution of a viable and enduring political heritage. Take the Tiv myths regarding the philosophical explanation for 'Ingratitude' which has let tortoise with a patched body for instance. The philosophical elements in such and similar myths and folktales discourages any sane man from paying wickedness for good. In the second instance take the illustration of 'Akombo' religious rituals among the Tiv of Nigeria in which the whole society is protected from all form of malfunction. Elsewhere, the Igbo *Ala* is the Custodian of morality, and source of moral sanction. The *Ile* in Yoruba thoughts plays similar roles like the Tiv *swem* (god of justice) who from time to time is invoked to render justice, to right the wrong. All these illustrations point to the ocular fact that indigenous knowledge properly harnessed will be a major breakthrough in our efforts to find at least a theoretical base for solutions to our problems of nation building. This is because, indigenous knowledge has the capacity to liberate the mind, mould the man, and shape his value orientation and so establish his power. For as the Latin adage has it; *fundamentum Omnis Cultus* i.e the foundation of all development is the development of the mind.

Furthermore, proverbs and aphorism which are found in abundance everywhere in Africa as expressions of the African outlook on the created world could also make significant contribution to the making of a new Nigeria. Proverbs arise out of the natural surrounding of the African. They help to shape his personality in relation to others and his creator, and so geared towards self-realization and self-fulfillment. As sources of knowledge, proverbs awaken our primal source, to find our way back to ourselves and to be conscious of our present predicaments; proverbs leads us to mental reorientation, reevaluation of our value system and the emergency of the spirit of initiative and nationalism which important ingredients for national development and progress. Take the present Nigerian Syndrome of importing and or imitating everything including thought pattern and tooth pick from Europe as an example. To such, the Igbo proverb would speak to them thus, *onye oku n'agba ulo Ya adighi achuke* i.e. "he whose house is on fire does not go chasing

rats” In this way, we are lead to mentally re-orientate and re-evaluate our values system in agreement with the national value system, to face and tackle our national problems headlong.

To address these challenges, there is a need for an African paradigm of democracy that is context-specific, inclusive, and resilient. This paradigm should:

- i. Draw on African Values: African democracies should draw on African values, such as *Ayatutu* (seeking the whole from the units), *Ubuntu* (humanity towards others), and *Ujamaa* (familyhood), to inform democratic theory and practice.
- ii. Prioritize Inclusive Participation: Inclusive participation is crucial in African democracies, ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives are represented.
- iii. Foster Strong Institutions: Building strong institutions, including independent judiciaries and robust electoral commissions, is essential for democratic stability.
- iv. Promote African Agency: African democracies should prioritize African agency, taking ownership of their democratic development and resisting external interference.

In this way, we will be playing the role of a philosopher kings who as it were, will not just be and women of abstract thought detached from public affairs, but ones who enter into his special duties of life while keeping himself so conversant with all other affairs of the community that he gives everything its proper place. In Plato's words, “he is a man of intelligence and transparent honesty. He loves truth and hates falsehood, not a slave of his passion and is incorruptible in private and public affairs”.¹³ Argued on this, score African knowledge system embellished in oral tradition should guard our elected leaders and guide their every step as they traverse the mucky waters of politics. The African spirit of solidarity and subsidiary in the biotic community should instigate our rulers to advocate a vision of society centered on the human person and his inalienable rights on the values of justice, and peace, and on a correct relationship between individuals and the community. Such is when bridges, roads and hospitals count as democracy dividends. Then, the ruled and the rulers must be united in saying to each other, if you are at peace so am I, but if you are in trouble so am I, they must believe in unity as the Tiv do that *ihye mom ngi ov ga* (i.e. a single bracelet does not make noise), and that, when minds are the same that which is far will come and say like the Ethiopians that; when spider webs unite, they tie upon a lion, and similarly chorus like the Bonder of Tanzania that stick in a bundle are unbreakable, or say like the Igbo that; if a person buries himself alone, one of his hand will be out.

These strands of African oral lexis more than any other underscore the principles and practice of democracy. The jargons of the west must be baptized with the humanism of Africa which emphasizes concern, care and community. The Tiv proverbs, *Uyange angbian uta-an-kar unyiin pue una bunde u* properly defines the democratic tenet of popular participation and interests which as the saying goes is the only thing that is permanent. This ethical paradigm entails a

¹³. Quoted by Igboko, P.M. “Platonic Philosophy in Relation of National Development” in Uhe, Nsukka 1976:11

tempering of material acquisition with the cultivation of the mind, for a people who deploy all their resources to providing food for the body only, shall leave nothing but a legacy, of skeletons and excrements of their offspring.

Africa democracy must therefore be erected on the pillars of a strong, responsible and accountable institution. It must also strive to promote mass participation and empowerment of the people, advance freedom, human rights and social justice. Such is what African knowledge system promotes through its culture of non-violence and respect for life, solidarity, subsidiarity, just economic order and a culture of tolerance and life of truthfulness. This is a call for the reinstitution of African values namely,

- i. reintegration of African Spiritual and communal resources for nation building which emphasis interconnectedness of individuals as part of a larger web of life, connected to ancestors, spirits, and each other.
- ii. Community rituals and ceremonies: Participating in traditional rituals and ceremonies brings people together, fostering social bonding and a sense of belonging.
- iii. Shared values and beliefs: African Spiritualities emphasize communal values like respect, reciprocity, and solidarity, promoting a sense of shared identity.
- iv. Ancestor veneration: Honoring ancestors and the spirit world that creates a sense of continuity and shared heritage, bridging generational and social divides.

The sum total of these traditional values are captured in the Tiv concept of *Ayatutu*, the idea of communal living that has intrinsic value, that is, that life grows more meaningfully in solidarity with other members of the community. This is a statement to the effect that loyalty to, and building network among community members is itself building solid bridges of human communion; a community in which ethical judgment, specifically the prescription to become a real self or a complete person is exhibited in words and deeds, in humaneness and humanness.¹⁴ This communal spirit reflects the African political system, particularly in during decision making through consensus, discussions, consultations, dialogue and compromise. While the situation might take the shape of imposing the will of the majority on the minority it is not in any way see the community as a constellation of impersonal forces but rather a complex of human beings and human interests that upholds the ethos of resolving human antagonistic interests through negotiation. In what is truly democratic in decision makings, the perspective of every lineage in the village is represented in the presence and contributions of their representative.¹⁵

This point has been strengthened by Wirendu when he says;

In the rare case of an intractable division, a majority vote might be used to

¹⁴. Ihuah, S. Alloy 'Ayatutuism: Reminiscing the Akume Learship Recruitment Model", In: *Philosophy and Praxis*, Vol. 14 No. 1, 2024, p. 31

¹⁵. Read details in: IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities. Vol. 1 No 1, June 2015. pp. 1-10

break the impasse. But the success of a system must be judged by the rarity of such predicaments in the working of the decision-making bodies of the state..¹⁶

These cannons of African ontology should be carefully guided to sustain African democratic tradition. Then African will not only be interested in interpreting the world but also in changing it, not engaging in sterile discourse but virile speculation that serve the basis for action according to which a nation worth living in, and dying for will emerge. This is a task that must be done by the African leadership; to examine the shape and form of our lives, to map the safety signals on our way in life so that from apparent ashes of our current despair-even as a nation- a new hope may emerge and the masses may at least attain that citizenship that is their right in the nation still profoundly alienating to them.

This is the desired democracy of Africa of the new past which sees personhood as a gift from other persons and that, each person is a focus of shifting forces, changing as they change, existing only as a part of the different relationships that bind us to others¹⁷ (Ihuah 2022:107). This leadership philosophy does not treat individuals as entities in action and thought, separated from one another, rather, the individual is connected and dependent on others in the community for true self-hood and full humanity. In essence, this Leadership model is far from arbitrariness and impunity that are the hallmark of tyrannical and dictatorial regimes. This African communal spirit was recounted by the Nigerian president during a visit to Anambra State when he says,

We will continue to be brothers. We are one family, a single family, diverse, living in the same house called Nigeria. We are only staying in different rooms. Our diversity must lead to prosperity. We must work together to be a united Nigeria.¹⁸

Given the African problems and a catalogue of issue affecting her democratic journey, the tasks before us in our distressed continent are many

- i. Given that culture of people is its source and way of life, we must do our share in preserving the soul of African culture without canonizing all its features. We must be sufficiently, critical of those cultural traits that tend to arrest the people's drive for human development.
- ii. Regardless of the impact of modernization, the African intelligentsia are called upon to develop strategies of understanding and expectations that will release the great pillars of society – truth, justice, concern for others and reset them to form the pillars of a new Africa in contemporary world.
- iii. The myth that all modernization is western – style must be exploded. The challenge is an

¹⁶. Wiredu, K. "The African Concept of Personhood," in Flack, Harley E. and Pellegrino, 1995, 62

¹⁷. Ihuah S. Alloy, "Of Seeking the Whole from the Units: A Discourse Analysis of Aristotle's Essence, Asouzu's Ibuanyidanda and the Tiv Ayatutu Ontology", In: *APPON Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 1 No. 1, 2022, p. 107.

¹⁸. Taken from From President Tinubu's official Facebook Page accessed on 10th May, 2025

intellectual one to evolve an African conceptual frame within which understandings and expectations are emerging in Africa, to analyze the main characteristics of that frame so that in order to bring about a sense of direction, one first understands the processes of social challenges.

- iv. As the various religious and cultural traditions came more and more in contact with each other there is a growing realization that fashioning the new Africa has to be a work of collaboration. There has to be an increase in tolerance and generosity without a loss of commitment.

Argued as such, the African political class should make practical efforts to canonize indigenous knowledge system in the syllabi of our schools so as to bring about personal integration and social construction and stability. For Russell confirms.

Whenever there are mass prejudices whether of nationalism or of race or of religious bigotry, the schools ought to set themselves consciously to the softening of such prejudices.¹⁹

Adequate knowledge of who we are and the way we are through a rigorously national introspection obviously empowers us as individuals but more so as a people to enlarge our thought and free them from the tyranny of custom and negative thinking. Through this, knowledge is not greatly increased; our relationship with others and the world is positively refocused. In the same way we are detached from arrogant dogmatism and our sense of wonder kept alive. Here, self knowledge of Africa's past is restored to engender wisdom, the science of life that enables people to think well, to reason practically and to see clearly into the cause of things, to analyze our own acts and motives, and to try to understand those of others.

Conclusion:

This paper has highlighted the complexities and challenges of democratic governance in Africa. And has argued a context-specific, inclusive, and resilient African paradigm of democracy. It has concluded that, African countries can build stronger, more sustainable democratic institutions that are foregrounded on the trade-religio-cultural milieu of the African peoples, better equipped to address the continent's unique challenges. This is a quality of life that is lived by a Benue born quintessential leader, George Akume.²⁰ He evolved democratic dispositions that promoted inclusivity and nonviolence. This disposition has been well articulated by Bethke Elshtain thus:

A preparedness to work with others different from oneself towards shared ends;
a combination of strong convictions with a readiness to compromise in the

¹⁹. Russell, B., *Truth and Fiction*, LONDON George & Unwin Ltd. 1961:67

²⁰. For a detailed discourse of George Akume's leadership recruitment model, read Alloy S. Ihuah, "Ayatutuism: Reminiscing the Akume Leadership Recruitment Model", In: *Philosophy and Praxis*, Vol. 14 No. 1, 2024, pp. 29-58

recognition that one cannot always get everything one wants; and a sense of individuality and a commitment to civic goods that are not the possession of one person or one of one small group alone²¹

Amidst moral degeneracy, political immaturity and economic slavery that has plagued the African nations with high level of dehumanization, added to the obvious fact of cultural distance between the traditional societies from which it moves and the modern towards which it moves, there is a supreme task on the part of the political leadership; the challenge to jointly construct and live together in societies all can jointly judge worthwhile, to restore the human dimensions to the enterprises that characterize the age.

This is a call for a new mental outlook in which life of the people is reoriented towards a greater harmony between convictions and actions, and around humanitarian use. Then, the fundamental problem of injustice, the terrible evils of religious and political intolerance, economic and political sabotage and the widening gap between the rich and poor, that have come to stay in our body polity will be banished and a truly habitable human society established. This entails functional attitude of the collective and individual knowledge and spirit of the people in retrospective dialogue with the past. A people who cannot trace their own footprint from the past are more likely to walk in the shadow of other people's progress than forge their way into future over which they can claim reasonable measure a control and self-determination. We may, in alliance with Moses Akin Makinde²² suggest a traditional option in dealing with the monster sin Nigerian politics. These monstrous couple; contradiction and absurdity which has in turn given birth to indiscipline and lawlessness, agreed and corruption cannot withstand the taste of the power of African metaploysical prowess. We recall here the Yoruba *Agogo Eewo*, a deadly device use to identify indisciplined, lawless, greedy and corrupt people in society, the Igbo *Amadioha*, god of justice and the Tiv *Swem* cult of justice among others. Its adoption might put an end social and political maladies in our society. Here reasoned, our impoverished land, which has experienced wear and tear from the activities of politicians and leaders whose conscience is on leave, and who nurture and water the seeds of wrong relationship with nature, people and God, will be refilled with milk and honey.

I conclude that, African democracy is a complex and multifaceted institution that has been bedevilled by historical, cultural, and socio-economic values. While democratic governance in many African nations suffered due to the legacy of authoritarianism, institutional weaknesses, corruption, lack of accountability, religious, ethnic and regional divide, African nations can still

²¹. Jean Bethke, *Democracy on Trial*, New York, Basic Books, 1930, p. 3

²². For a detailed understanding of the complexities of human societies and its paradoxes, read Makinde, M. A., *African Philosophy: The Demise of a controversy*, Ile-Ife, OAU Press, 2007

rise again if its indigenous epistemic and metaphysical assemblages are reactivated. This can be done through growing civil society, inclusive governance and institutional strengthening. This is the character of a democracy that is dedicated by humane and noble cause of the followers/ruled. This portrait of democracy is African in origin and content. It is guided by basic African values and principles of communalism and co-operative teamwork that promotes and progresses African nations.

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