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School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics

CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: A PHILOSOPHICAL
INQUIRY

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DECLARATION

I, Yaye Christopher Oyoo, do hereby declare to the best of my knowledge that this is my original work submitted for the Award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. No part of this work may be reproduced without prior permission of the author and/or the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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DEDICATION

For

The Most Innocent and Holy

Marion Immaculate Oyoo [8th November, 2015], R.I.P

A life that *never* ushered itself in with a cry

Yet with a long-loud-painful moan

Did take leave like all others

A light that never shown

A hope that never was

Whose memory

Stirs *us* to the keenest sense of sorrow

And

To

Willis Okello Nyawinda [1962 – 2015], R.I.P

A Brother

A Friend; and

A Mentor

A humble generous man

Of God

Who did not afford to live for just

A little-while-longer

To witness the completion of

A dance in which he so much invested

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CORD – The Coalition for Restoration of Democracy

FORD – Forum for Restoration of Democracy

IDPs – Internally Displaced Persons

IEBC – Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission

IMF – International Monetary Fund

MDC – Movement for Democratic Change

NDP – National Development Party

NGOs – Non-Governmental Organisations

SECAM – Symposium of Episcopal Conferences for Africa and Madagascar

DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. Consensus

In general sense, consensus means harmony, and general agreement by a group of people. It stipulates common consent. For purposes of this study, consensus means a group discussion where everyone's opinion is heard as well as understood; and a solution that respects those opinions is arrived at. It is not the preference of the majority, but rather the best solution that can be arrived by a group at a particular time.

2. Liberal Democracy

In this study liberal democracy is a political system, which allows citizens to engage in free political competition, periodic multiparty elections. It is a political system in which there is the choice of political leaders by the people through competitive elections, a guarantee of extensive civil and political rights, the rule of law and public accountability.

3. Western Democracy

Western democracy refers to the form of governance that was introduced in Africa during the period of European colonial contact with the continent. It is a type of democracy that is perceived to be fostering colonial tendencies; and yet it is still being imposed as the only legitimate form of governance towards the realisation of human wellbeing in contemporary Africa.

4. True Democracy

Is a type political governance that generates hopes and aspirations in the lives of the governed by establishing principles of political equality, freedom and dignity; and brings about a concrete sense of empowerment and opportunity to the populace. It is characterised by popular participation and consent as necessary conditions for the promotion of the common good and human wellbeing.

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Lastly, I register my indebtedness to all those people who invoke the spirit of cooperation through the ages – past, present and future – and welcome into existence the words “*Integrated Consensus*” as a new distinction that may bring forth a democratic government through the spirit of cooperation. I acknowledge our African families, communities, networks and groups that have grown us to the realisation that the most important thing in the world is people. Ask me the focus and the most important thing in the practice of democracy, and I will say to you it is people, it is people, it is people.

I thank you all.

ABSTRACT

That there is an incessant struggle for the establishment of a viable and meaningful democracy in post-independence Africa is not in doubt. Contemporary Africa is characterized by political instability and abysmally poor governmental performance indicative of lack of consonance and congruence between traditional African political values on the one hand, and the practice of Western democracy on the other. In contradistinction to pre-colonial polity that had highly developed democratic political systems, almost all political regimes in post-colonial Africa have consistently claimed to be democratic and yet their rule has largely been characterized by political authoritarianism, illegitimate seizure of power, massive corruption, political assassinations, escalating insecurity, food crisis *et cetera*. These challenges are further compounded by the fact that the practice of Western democracy in Africa has created of the African populace a dichotomy, which is diametrically opposed to African humanism. Against this backdrop, the study employs textual and conceptual analysis of philosophical inquiry to appraise the practice of democracy; and investigate the basis of traditional African democratic polity. It also examines whether Western notions of democracy are well-suited for contemporary African polities by asking the following fundamental questions: a) What makes democracy democratic? b) In what ways can traditional African system of government benefit contemporary democratic practice in Africa? In view of the foregoing, the study concludes that: a) The failure of democracy to function properly in post-independence Africa is hinged on illegitimacy and ineffectiveness of Western democracy, which is an illegitimate colonial construct: b) For democracy to be meaningfully and viably established in contemporary Africa, it should be hinged on political communal existence of Africans, which in effect relates to equality within a polity; and, c) There is need for an alternative form of democracy in Africa hinged on African cultural values and practices. In the foregoing respect, the study proposes “Integrated Consensual Democracy” as an alternative form of democracy for contemporary Africa. It is argued that this is a viable form of self rule responsive to the needs and aspirations of Africans as it is premised on their cultural values and practices. The study makes, however, among others, the recommendation that further research should establish why even with communal solidarity, which is so widespread in rural societies of Africa, contemporary Africa is still far from producing modes of governance that the populace can freely accept.

INTRODUCTION

Any programme of social transformation, which would succeed in addressing the question of how Africans can develop and maintain viable social orders within which individuals can exercise their rights, perform their obligations, and realise their genuine human potentials, has to contend with the problem of the entrenchment of ethnic/clan consciousness in most African societies. What is required in this respect is not to obliterate this consciousness or pretend that it is not important. What is required is the construction of political systems within which this aspect of our social experience can be accommodated in a manner that it does not threaten social cohesion.

[Olusegun Oladipo, “*Tradition and the Quest for Democracy in Africa*”, 2000]

There is an incessant struggle for the establishment of true, viable and meaningful democracy in post-independence Africa. A critical look at contemporary Africa reveals a type of democratic dispensation that is characterized by political instability and abysmally poor governmental performance indicative of lack of consonance and congruence between traditional African political values on the one hand, and the practice of Western¹ democracy on the other. It is argued in this study that what accounts for the myriad challenges facing democracy in contemporary Africa is the fact that the state in post-independence Africa has politically held too tightly to its colonial antecedent. Nevertheless, as William Turdoff observes, colonialism was not merely a system of exploitation but one whose essential purpose was to repatriate the profits to the so called ‘mother country’ (Turdoff, 1984:33). Thus, politically, colonial rule was authoritarian without any meaningful outlets for political expression.² This is in contradistinction to traditional African political systems, which according to Claude Ake, were invariably infused with democratic values, communal consciousness and stricter standards of accountability (Ake, 1993:72). The study points out that African

¹ This study uses the term Western democracy to refer to the form of governance that was introduced in Africa during the period of European colonial contact with the continent. Since that type of democracy is mostly manifested in its liberal form, the term Western democracy is used interchangeably with liberal democracy; and what Kwasi Wiredu simply calls *majoritarian* democracy.

² See (Turdoff, 1984: 33-34).

traditional institutions display, incontestably, a process of government that is democratic in the sense that complete participation of the people is in-built. It is on this understanding that the study advances that African traditional institutions provided ‘participatory communality’³ which rendered political relevance to the practice of democracy within a people’s cultural milieu.

In view of the foregoing, it is argued that in Africa, democracy is unlikely to work, or to endure, unless it is compatible with the fundamental beliefs of the people. As such, the legitimacy of democracy derives from the principle of popular sovereignty. That is, ordinary citizens are equally endowed with the right and ability to govern themselves. In disregard of this fact, democracy is bound to face challenges of deep uneasiness by the populace about its actual workings. Thus, in order to achieve democratic legitimacy in Africa, the people must fully be allowed participate in its creation through a deliberative process of consensus building that allows for their fundamental values to be revealed.

Resultantly, there is a need to jettison the mistaken assumption that Western democracy transplanted in Africa during the colonial period carries with it the seed of liberation for Africa’s socio-political maladies. Western democracy, as the study further points out, is hinged on the concept of colonial domination, which devalues the culture of the African people and denies them the existence of a distinctive political system. This is an assumption of cultural superiority of the colonizer that suggests, as Segun Gbadegesin rightly points out, the burden of ‘civilising’ the subjugated territories; and legitimising an otherwise unpopular rule by means of ideological distortion of the reality that underlies the relationship between the metropolis and the colony (Gbadegesin, 1991:177-8). Besides, as Eghosa Osaghae argues, Western democracy at best only fosters colonial tendencies in contemporary Africa, yet it is still being imposed as the only legitimate form of governance towards the realisation of human wellbeing

³ The concept of participatory communality simple means that the populace shares a communal image; and there is concern for the wellbeing of each other. The disadvantaged are supported and everyone feels a sense of belonging by the simple fact that they are. It is a shared form of life where everything is everybody’s affair.

(Osaghae, 1999:10). It, thus, remains one of the crises of contemporary Africa. Put differently, colonial democracy was a perfect means of expropriating Africa's resources. Unfortunately, nothing has changed in the postcolonial state. There appears to be an unceasing attitude of alienating the ruled from the rulers; as well as non-accountability to the governed.

Thus, with bribery, carelessness about state property and other un-ethical acts deleterious to the development and welfare of the state, the practice of Western democracy has failed to generate sentiments of personal commitment to the state. It has created of the African people a dichotomy, which is diametrically opposed to African humanism. Instead, citizens are divided into those who "belong" on the one hand and "outsiders" on the other. The latter being ordinary citizens who in Paulin Hountondji's description are those:

...living far from the mysterious workings of power, a stranger to all inner circles where momentous events and actions that would only later break out in broad daylight were secretly planned (Hountondji, 2002:115-116).

Undoubtedly, it is against these observations that it is imperative to take recourse, as Gyekye argues, to those African atavistic political values and attitudes relevant for the creation of a meaningful and viable democracy in modern Africa.⁴ Arguably, therefore, this study underscores that there is an urgent need for the establishment of a legitimate basis of democratic governance in Africa, which recognises the fundamental cultural fabric that holds Africans together. Such a basis, the study points out, should be reckoned against African humanism essentially described as:

A philosophy that sees human needs, interests and dignity as of fundamental importance and concern. For the art, actions thought and institutions of African people, at least in the traditional setting,

⁴ Kwame Gyekye is an ardent supporter of the fact that if democracy is to be viable in contemporary Africa, then recourse to Africa's traditional political values that could be incorporated into modern democratic system cannot be gainsaid. See (Gyekye, 1997:136ff).

reverberate with expressions of concern for human welfare (Gyekye, 1997:158).

Against the foregoing, the realisation of true, meaningful and viable democracy in post-independence Africa can only be possible by way of eclecticism – that is, by way of a people validating their heritage, by exploring their cultural practices and incorporating those Western political values that are in line with the values that underpin democracy *sui generis*. In consequence, the study proposes a type of democracy – Integrated Consensual Democracy – hinged on cultural values and practices of the African people in order to cater for their needs and aspirations. It is a type of democracy which ought to be characterised by popular participation and consent as necessary conditions for the promotion of the common good and human wellbeing (Osaghae, 1999:10). This democratic typology, built on a pro-people foundation and responsiveness to their needs, is what is at stake in contemporary Africa since it is bound to be “more performance-cum-welfarist oriented and accountability demanding...” (Osaghae, 1999:22). Joseph Nyasani also captures this necessity of grounding true democracy on a people’s cultural values by asserting that:

...all human beings possess a unique capacity to develop in a variety of ways always in proportion to and in conformity with the peculiar prevailing circumstances, people’s attitudes, social sophistication, the pressures of social and intellectual challenges and many other relevant considerations (Nyasani, 2010:57).

In view of the foregoing, it is argued that in the proposed Integrated Consensual Democracy, civil liberties and human rights as well as commitment to the common good are espoused as fundamental democratic principles. As such, it is a type of democracy that offers the citizens means of access to governmental processes and participation in collective decision-making. As Kwasi Wiredu argues, consensus was a system, “set up for participation in power, not its appropriation, and the underlying philosophy was one of cooperation, not confrontation” (Wiredu, 1996:187).

In sum, the viability and meaningfulness of Integrated Consensual Democracy as a democratic option for post-independence Africa lies in the fact that it is not only characterised by genuine participation, but also, consistent and effective channels of accountability between the populace and public officials.⁵

Methodological Approach

In order to meet its set objectives, this study, being philosophical in nature, primarily employs philosophical methods of textual and conceptual analysis to investigate the philosophical basis of democracy both in traditional and modern day Africa. This approach is reminiscent of the Socratic critico-analytic method of philosophical investigation, which consists in awakening self-reflection. As such it provides insight into African traditions of political thought and practice into which the study delves.

The practice of Western democracy in contemporary Africa necessitates an in-depth examination, a subjection to ‘Socratic sting’ in order to conceptualize possibilities of ways of governance appropriate for Africa today. It is in so doing that Africans may reach the fullness of democratic experience: “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Plato, 1966:38). In view of the foregoing, the study analyses concept that relate to democracy in a traditional African set-up, and proposes an eclectic approach to integrating such features into the practice of democracy for the realisation of true democracy in contemporary Africa.

There is also another way in which the critico-analytical method is important in the context of this study. It enables the study to consider questions about the practice of Western democracy in a more in-depth and analytical manner. For example, many states in post-colonial Africa are held to be democratic because they follow a democratic process normally conceived in the context of holding periodic elections. Often it does not matter whether there are flaws in the election process or not. Rather, what matters

⁵ See (Wiredu, 1996:185).

is that a regime is ‘democratically elected’ and placed in power. In view of this, other than just ask whether a regime is procedurally and legally in power or otherwise, this methodology opens up new horizons of analysis by focussing on how concepts precede each other in the practice of democracy – conceptual priority. That is, it leads to reflection on the general fact that if one has to make a general claim that the subject democracy “S”, possesses some fundamental characteristics or property “P”, then it follows of necessity that such a one must have some prior means of identifying the subject “S”.

In respect to such in-depth analysis, the study poses certain fundamental questions such as: a) What makes democracy democratic? b) Is a democratic process equivalent to democracy *per se*? c) Is to be declared a leader in contemporary democracy the same as to be appointed a leader in African traditional context? d) What constitutes democracy *sui generis*? The understanding of what democracy means is filtered through a system of values, normative priority⁶ whereby, the notion of the common-good is brought to bear on the question of legitimacy of democracy. It is argued in this regard that democracy is predicated upon the meeting of its obligations to the citizenry.

Most importantly, both textual and conceptual analysis within the framework of comparison of political institutions and practices across African traditional set-ups, allows the study a degree of legitimacy to generalise about Africa; and possibly speak about African culture and way of life. People who disagree with such possibilities and generalisations may opt to argue that Africa is a diverse continent; and to lump all her independent states together and talk about an African something could be misleading. In fact, they may hold the view that Africa is too varied and complex to be encompassed in such a broad sweep.

⁶ Normative priority refers to the fact that in defining what democracy is, the value it ought to bring about in people’s lives – their welfare - should come prior to any other consideration.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that my main contention on this issue is not necessarily about how Africa is constituted in complexity as a continent but, as Chabal rightly observes, “on the grounds of discussing it as a whole for analytical purposes” (Chabal, 2009:21). This is to say that philosophical inquiry or analysis does not look at Africa in purely geographical and numerical terms to ask how many states constitute it. Rather, Africa is regarded as a concept for holistic analysis.

Philosophical inquiry follows a tri-dimensional process of philosophical analysis – the logical, the factual and the normative. First, in philosophical inquiry, we make use of implicit logic. For instance, in analysing what democracy is, the concept itself is taken to fit into a whole nexus of other concepts. Consequently, a logical implication of a system of government being democratic is taken to mean that the inhabitants enjoy political equality and justice (Keith, 1973:9).

Secondly, philosophical inquiry also imparts matters of fact. It is not only concerned with *a priori* arguments for we know empirically from the world in which we live that democracy is incompatible with vast differences in personal wealth. As such the importance of *a posteriori* arguments is also considered. Lastly, a philosophical inquiry encompasses a normative aspect in that it elicits why the concept democracy is favoured and how it connects with other values of human existence (Keith, 1973:9). It is to be noted, however, that these three aspects of philosophical inquiry are really three aspects rather than three distinct parts. They combine to provide the analytical nexus between textual and conceptual analysis yielding a plausible interpretation of the meaning of true democracy as such.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the philosophical theory of communitarianism. As such, arguments that build up to the viability of democracy in post-independence Africa are hinged on the fact that we human beings share enough with others around us that a well-

intentioned democratic government could, by drawing on the wisdom and experience of others, arrive at reasonable set of beliefs about its citizens' good – the common good, which defines the community's way of life rather than adjusting itself to the patterns of individual and jingoistic interests of the political class (Kymlicka, 1990:206). Accordingly, in line with Masolo's argument, the study upholds the view that:

The status of the political and moral community have rights that are not just independent from those of the individual but are also more important in some crucial ways that warrant the freedoms of the individual for the goodness of the collective whole (Masolo, 2010:222).

In consequence, arguments are advanced to the effect that what is regarded by the populace as the good of the whole is tied in important ways to the cultural practices they share with others within the community (Kymlicka, 1990:203). That is, within the confines of communitarian thought, the study advances that the practice of democracy entails the way a person feels and thinks in union with all other people around him or her.⁷ In view of this, it is argued that the practice of democracy in post-independence Africa should promote traditional attitudes and freedoms that enable people to judge what is valuable in life by exploring the different aspects of their shared cultural heritage.

In sum, since communitarianism represents “the sum of all ethical values, all shared experiences and responses, the consciousness of belonging together through history, reinforced by religious and cultural homogeneity” (Masolo, 2010:223), it leads to an ethical state where subjective freedom is valued against its contribution to the prescriptions to the common good. It is against this understanding that the study makes the conclusion that a consensual type of democracy in line with communal *ethos* of Africans is more viable and meaningful in modern times. This is basically because it is a type of democracy which sustains itself through a process of communication and dialogue leading to consensus on values and cultural norms (Masolo, 2010:224).

⁷ See (Senghor, 1964:94).

Chapter organisation

The study is organised into six chapters, which give a detailed critical and analytical account of what can be rightly termed as fundamental issues on culture and democratic practice in contemporary Africa. These chapters constitute the major analytical engagement of the study. Chapter 1 deals with democracy in Africa. It espouses a philosophical understanding of the concept of democracy; and provides the context within which the concept is to be understood in respect to this study.

In Chapter 2 the study principally provides a philosophical account of the failure of Western democracy in Africa. This chapter points out that the failures of democracy in Africa are associated with the fact that liberal democracy emerged from the experience of a culture – the European culture. As such, being culture-specific, it cannot be universally applied to other cultural contexts without qualification. To do so would not only render democracy a bad name but also make it illegitimate and ineffective.

Chapter 3 picks from the discussions of the previous chapter and gives a detailed account of the nexus between African culture and democracy. It provides an analysis of African traditional cultural values and practices that are deemed appropriate for the establishment of a meaningful and viable democratic practice in contemporary Africa. A philosophical position is presented on how such practices can be brought to bear on modern democratic practice and experience on the continent by drawing primarily on the work of Gyekye and Wiredu.

Chapter 4 makes a presentation of traditional antecedents of democracy. This is done in a bid to bridge the chasm between modernity and tradition. It gives a philosophical roadmap of how to forge a new understanding of the concept of democracy in modern

day Africa. The chapter proposes Integrated Consensual Democracy as a new form of self rule for contemporary Africa. It makes the argument that this new form of governance is based on a pro-people foundation; and is, as such, responsive to their needs and aspirations.

Chapter 5 gives focus to the feasibility of the new theory that the study proposes by looking at possible criticisms that are likely to emerge from the analyses already undertaken. Responses to such possible criticisms are offered against the backdrop of rigorous philosophical contemplation to provide prospects for the study as such.

In Chapter 6, the study makes a presentation of summary, conclusion and recommendations. With the presentation of conclusion, the study has put forward certain philosophical positions that definitely invite argumentation.

In sum, these six chapters share a linking thread as they mirror the cycle of democratic governance as experienced in contemporary Africa. They unravel the incremental complexity of democratic practice in contemporary Africa. It is hoped that this study brings analytical clarity to democratic practice in Africa in contemporary times.

CHAPTER ONE

DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

While democracy has triumphed as the political system of choice, it is showing an increasing degree of popular disaffection. [...] The average citizen is feeling estranged from the political process and the more-or-less permanent political class.... This is causing a crisis in the meaning of democracy...

[Richard Swift, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Democracy*, 2002]

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is about democracy in Africa. It provides an analysis of the African understanding of democracy by attempting to respond to certain fundamental questions such as: What is the African understanding of democracy? Is African understanding of democracy similar to or different from the European or American understanding of the same? Implicit in these questions is the larger issue and concern about the nature and meaning of democracy – about the universality of democratic ideals and practices.

It is to be noted that among scholars, attempts to define democracy has often led to many “frames of reference”. This is why Frederic Schaffer raises the question whether “the Senegalese understanding of *demokaraasi* relates to American understandings of democracy” (Schaffer, 2000:x). In the same vein, Pratap Mehta asks whether one “can fix the meaning of democracy, the hopes and aspirations it generated, in a setting as socially diverse as India’s” (Mehta, 2003:2). Both views point to the complexity of the

nature of democracy as well as the dynamism of its applicability to a particular socio-cultural context.

Nonetheless, Frank Cunningham holds that an understanding of democracy should entail in various ways the interpenetration of:

...normative questions about the value of democracy; the descriptive questions concerning the way societies called democratic actually function or might realistically be anticipated to function; and semantic questions about the meaning of democracy (Cunningham, 2002:11).

As result of this, the debate on the meaning of democracy has led some scholars to argue for a widening of the ‘democratic canon’; that is, what passes for an appropriate meaning of democracy should be enlarged so that, as is the case with “bio-diversity”, so should there be “demo-diversity” (De Sousa and Avritzer, 2007:lxii).

In consideration of the foregoing, this chapter not only confronts the challenges of democratic practice in contemporary Africa, but also provides a profound sense of what democracy means or is all about. By considering the challenges democracy faces, it suggests a new ideological imagination that can contextualise and throw light on problems associated with it.

1.2 The concept and practice of democracy

The concept and practice of democracy require in-depth analysis and understanding. In this section I attempt to respond to the question, “What is democracy?” The question of what democracy really is has serious analytical implications. It is important to state from the onset what such implications are. That is, prior to the unraveling of what democracy is, it is crucial to unravel the fundamental issues underlying the concept itself. At the

centre of the question, ‘What is democracy?’ lie three fundamental issues – the question of political standing, the issue of quality of life, and the explanation (Tilly, 2007:6-7)⁸ of democratic practice. An exposition of these fundamental issues helps, to a greater extent, in deciding how a system of governance qualifies to be democratic or otherwise.

a) The Political Standing

By political, I have in mind those institutions that allocate power. I place analytical primacy on the interaction between the three nested levels of political traditions, political regimes as well as political institutions. In this regard, therefore, the question of *political standing* simply means that political power holders must know whether they are dealing with democracies or not. This distinction is crucial and heuristically useful because, as Charles Tilly rightly observes, “democracies behave differently from the rest” (Tilly, 2007:6). In fact, democracies meet their commitments or even break them differently; and this affects the political question, particularly international relations and political alliances. It is in this sense that the issue of political standing should be taken to be primarily concerned with political traditions. That is, in the words of Michael Bratton and Nicolas Van de Walle, those “long-standing cultural legacies that over time come to suffice political institutions and societal attitudes and thus achieve an autonomous capacity to influence political outcomes” (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997:37). To my mind, what this means is that the presence of democracy or its absence, heavily depends on the attitudes and practices of a people; and that these attitudes and practices must be taken into account in establishing what democracy means and entails as such.

⁸ One cannot take the question of democracy seriously without exposing the concept to such threefold understanding and analysis. The concept of “democracy” has become so universally sanctified that it means too many things – as to mean anything at all. From the most authoritarian regimes to the most open political systems, all swear by democracy. See (Tilly, 2007:6-7; Sartori, 1987:22; Schaffer, 2000).

b) The Quality of Life

The issue of quality of life refers to the support people give to democracy. This can be instrumental or intrinsic. It is intrinsic, on the one hand, when democracy is regarded as good-in-itself – possessing intrinsic value by rendering the populace a collective power to determine their socio-economic and political fate. According to Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes, the intrinsic value is embedded in the fact that democracy will deliver the citizens from authoritarian formulae – thus leading them to appreciate political freedom and equal rights that democracy entails (Bratton and Mattes, 2001:448).

On the other hand, the support is instrumental if it is based on whether democracy actually delivers better living conditions with regard to provision of and access to social services – education, medical care and security, *et cetera*. Consequently, democracy should not be supported if it does not meet the dreams and aspirations of populace in the ordinariness of their daily lives.

c) Explanation

Explanation means that democracy occurs under social and cultural conditions. Nevertheless, it has profound effects on the lives of the citizens in respect of how they identify and explain its impact on their collective or communal wellbeing.

With respect to these three fundamental issues, if we define democracy incorrectly, then we belittle its meaning as well as reduce people's chances for better lives, which is quintessentially the purpose of democracy. What is at stake, therefore, is to contextualise the extent and character of democracy. In order to do this, it is necessary

to draw up a precise definition of democracy, which incorporates the different fundamental issues regarding its nature as discussed above (Tilly, 2007:7). The establishment of a precise definition of democracy requires that the study looks at the various ways of defining democracy; and subjects them to critical analysis in order to establish which of the approaches can yield a plausible and precise definition of democracy.

1.2.1 Approaches to the definition of democracy

In order to take the discussion about democracy seriously, it is critical that we establish what exactly we are talking about. It is imperative that we develop a precise definition if we have to analytically explain the variation and change in the extent and character of democracy. Implicitly or otherwise, it is to be noted that scholars generally identify four different typologies of definitions of democracy⁹ – the constitutional, substantive, procedural and process oriented (Tilly, 2007:7). An analysis of each of these is necessary to delineate the character of democracy as such.

a. Constitutional Approach

As the name suggests, a constitutional definition of democracy puts emphasis on laws that a regime enacts concerning its political activity. It is the legal referent that differentiates polities and distinguishes them as oligarchy, monarchy or even as republics (Tilly, 2007:7). For most contemporary polities, democracy is a matter of constitutional declaration. This explains why most states make prominent claims in the constitution of their polities being a democracy with the hope that because the constitution so declares, the people will “obey” and have the political will to be nothing else but democratic – that is to say, the populace will think and act democratically.

⁹ These are the main types or approaches from which most scholars on democracy and democratisation choose their definition. See (David Held, 1996; O’Donnell, 1995, Ortega Ortiz, 2001).

A critical look at the opening chapters of the constitutions of both Kenya and South Africa¹⁰ reveals this phenomenon. The Republic of South Africa makes a constitutional declaration of her “democratic-status” in Chapter one, thus:

1. The Republic of South Africa is one, sovereign, democratic state founded on the following values:
 - (a) Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.
 - (b) Non-racialism and non-sexism.
 - (c) Supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law.
 - (d) Universal adult suffrage, a national common voters roll, regular elections and a multi-party system of democratic government, to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness (*Constitution of The Republic of South Africa*, No. 108 of 1996, Chapter 1, Section 1).

In the same way, Kenya makes an explicit claim to democracy in the second chapter of its Constitution, which is specifically dedicated to the nature of her Republic in the following manner:

4. (1) Kenya is a sovereign Republic.
 - (2) The Republic of Kenya shall be a multi-party democratic State founded on the national values and principles of governance referred to in Article 10 (*Constitution of Kenya, 2010*. Chapter 2, Article 4, Sections 1 & 2).

Article 10, referred to above, spells out the values associated with democracy in Kenya as follows:

- (2) The national values and principles of governance include–
 - (a) patriotism, national unity, sharing and devolution of power, the rule of law, democracy and participation of the people;

¹⁰ My preferential reason that necessitated the choice of these two states is familiarity. I am a Kenyan and I have had the chance to live in South Africa. As to how these two states are closer to or further from the realisation of the ideals of (true) democracy despite such constitutional declarations, is a project beyond the scope of this study.

- (b) human dignity, equity, social justice, inclusiveness, equality, human rights, non-discrimination and protection of the marginalised;
- (c) good governance, integrity, transparency and accountability; and
- (d) sustainable development (Constitution of Kenya, 2010. Chapter 2, Article 10, Section 2).

What can be pointed out and is evident from the excerpts above is the fact that there is a glaring connection between democracy and the values that ought to accompany its practice. In essence, democracy ought to foster human dignity and equity, liberty, integrity, transparency, *et cetera*. Nevertheless, one does not fail to raise a very simple yet fundamental question of whether the explicit mention of a polity as “democratic” in the constitution really makes it so in respect to the values associated with it. It is argued that there are bound to be large discrepancies between the announced principles and the daily practices – that is, the empirical lesson often goes counter to the constitutional proclamation; and to equate the two is to fall victim of the fallacy of *non sequitor* – it does not follow.

In view of the above, it is argued that a constitutional approach to the definition of democracy is misleading. Such a definition puts us in danger of ‘knowledge is virtue’ of Socrates¹¹ – and, of course, if to know good is to do good, then there would be only one law to know, but this is not the case. Those who know often go contrary to what they know – the essence of free choice. As a result, the constitutional approach to the definition of democracy does not hold since democracy is a good-in-itself that must go beyond self-declaration of the state, which merely portrays how a state views itself.

The opinion of the state about itself cannot be the truth and the essence of the state *per se*. This phenomenon explains why in most cases there are institutions that monitor the

¹¹ See Socrates as quoted by Enoch Stumpf in *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy*, 3rd edition, (1983:40).

democracies of different states based on both political and civil rights.¹² In most of Africa's contemporary democracies – despite *their* constitutional declarations as being democratic – there is a consolidation of autocratic power and inner circle control over revenues. The clique surrounding the political leadership grows richer as the rest of the country usually grows poorer (Wing, 2008:1). This, to my mind, is what betrays equality and justice, which are key elements of democracy *per se*.

Susanna Wing, in her book *Constructing Democracy in Africa: Mali in Transition*, observes that:

Since 1989, when democracy's third wave began to sweep across Africa, over fifty-seven new constitutions have been adopted in fifty one African countries. And yet only a handful of these laid the groundwork for more democratic states (Wing, 2008:1).

The question that flows logically from Wing's observation is: why has Africa's constitutionalism failed so consistently to produce a viable democratic practice on the continent? The answer lies neither in the fact that democracy depends on formulating and reformulating the rules that govern society nor by writing new constitutions; but rather on establishing governmental and institutional legitimacy. To my mind, therefore, constitutionalism matters but it is not the only thing that matters in a democracy. There is a need for both the political leadership as well as the populace to follow certain guidelines for purposes of social and political order in the society. It is human to be orderly and whether legislated or not there is some constitutional way of operation that defines the way people ought to behave.

¹² Freedom House (based in New York) is one such institution that monitors the democracies of different states. It assigns annually to every recognised country ratings on both the political and civil rights based on a scale of 1 (high) to 7 (low). It is to be noted that such institutions reserve the right to define what passes as both political and civil rights. However, a country may do well on the political rights wing but terribly fail on the civil rights wing. This may make it less democratic. Thus, how a country balances between the two rights is fundamental to its democratic ranking (For an in-depth discussion on this see Charles Tilly, 2007:2-3).

In consequence, despite the sonorous self-description – as a democracy – a state characterised by ills such as autocratic exercise of political authority, patriarchy leading to sectarian politics where only a few people benefit from a regime because they are “connected” to those at the helm of power, cannot pass as a democracy in any usual sense of the word. The question that ensues is, how should we decide how a system of governance qualifies to be a democracy or otherwise? In other words, what makes democracy democratic? This leads us to look at another way of defining democracy – the substantive approach.

b. Substantive Approach

One of the misgivings with the constitutional approach to the definition of democracy, as I have laboured to show above, is that human welfare within the state may be flagrantly opposed to what the constitution declares. Thus, in contradistinction to the constitutional approach, the substantive approach raises the fundamental question of whether a regime fosters or promotes human welfare – individual liberty, equity, deliberation, security, peaceful conflict resolution, *et cetera*. This approach advances the view that if a regime promotes human welfare, then it is democratic (Tilly, 2007:7). Nevertheless, as Tilly argues, it raises the problem of how to handle trade-offs among estimable principles – for instance, one wonders whether a desperately poor regime with citizens enjoying rough equality would be more democratic than that which is prosperous but in which the citizens are fiercely unequal (Tilly, 2007:7). With this consideration in mind, it is important to know, therefore, under what conditions and how a regime can be said to promote human welfare as such.

c. Procedural Approach

Under the procedural approach, a narrow range of governmental practices are singled out to determine whether a regime qualifies to be democratic or not. In his book *Capitalism, socialism, and democracy*, Joseph Schumpeter defines democracy as a political system in which free elections with universal suffrage create vertical accountability, as governors depend on the vote of the mass of population rather than being horizontally accountable to an undemocratic assembly of notables (Schumpeter, 1952:269). Undoubtedly, this is a minimalist conception of what democracy entails. It is to be pointed out that by making free elections the essence of democracy, Schumpeter basically ignores the empirical evidence of widespread existence of un-free and unfair elections that abound in most states in the world today.

While free elections are necessary for a state to be termed democratic in the Schumpeterian epistemic orientation, Terry Karl is of the view that they are not sufficient for democracy *per se*. He argues that defining democracy in this manner is bound to privileging elections – whether free or not – over all dimensions of democracy leading to what may be rightly termed as the “fallacy of electoralism” (Karl, 2000:95-96). In essence, free elections matter in determining a state as democratic but it is not all that matters.

This is why Tilly raises a fundamental concern about this approach. He argues that since this approach pays attention to such procedures as elections, the question that emerges is whether genuinely competitive elections, regularly engaging large numbers of citizens, produce change in governmental personnel and policy? (Tilly, 2007:8). The logical unraveling of Tilly’s concern can, at best, produce hypothetical results. That is, the procedural approach focuses mainly on elections – and, if elections actually cause significant governmental changes, then there is a procedural presence of democracy. In this respect, it is not clear what the cause or effect is with regard to elections and democracy. It is neither affirmed that elections actually cause significant government changes so there is electoral presence of democracy; nor is it denied that there is not electoral presence of democracy, so elections do not cause significant changes in government.

George Philip, in his article titled “*Democracy in Latin America*” also regards the equation of democracy to competitive elections as a minimalist approach to the definition and understanding of the concept democracy (Philip, 2001:164). It can be argued against the equation of democracy to competitive elections that democracy requires a more complex set of conditions – rule of law, respect for minority rights, respect for individual liberty, *et cetera*.

As a result, some scholars identify criteria that determine procedurally whether a regime is democratic or not to include the following:

1. A competitive, multiparty political system.
2. Universal adult suffrage for all citizens (with exception for restrictions that states may legitimately place on citizens for criminal offences).
3. Regularly contested elections conducted in conditions of ballot secrecy, reasonable ballot security, and in the absence of massive voter fraud that yields results that are unrepresentative of the public will.
4. Significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning (Piano and Puddington, 2004:716).

According to Piano and Puddington, the determination of the democratic status of a polity rests on multipartyism and periodic elections involving universal adult suffrage. This line of argument can be logically challenged. It can be argued, on the contrary, that these elements – periodic elections and adult suffrage – render the very determination of a regime as democratic or otherwise a difficult exercise. In themselves, they are a mere veneer of convenience working with an extremely thin conception of the political processes under consideration.

Proponents of this approach would further advance the argument that it offers citizens the possibility to exercise their freedom of choice, which is so basic to the meaning of democracy. This is because by it citizens do not only enjoy rights, but also exercise choice, a choice to make and remake the social world in accordance with their will (Mehta, 2003:8). It does not succeed in two respects: first, it is unclear whether the idea of choice itself is a meaningful claim or simply an illusion. Second, even if it were a meaningful claim, the exercise of political choice by the populace, their use of political opportunities that ‘democracy’ affords them, does not necessarily – and empirically so – lead to the creation of a better social order. In fact it can be argued that political choices have come to bear the imprint of social inequality that permeates democratic practice in contemporary Africa (Mehta, 2003:9).

In sum, even though the right to participate in choosing one’s electors is the most dramatic way of affirming democratic equality of all citizens, such a right is only a meagre right whose exercise in Africa is a periodic ritual with little or no bearing on the enhancement of the wellbeing of those who exercise it. There is an inherent failure of choice to determine whether a regime is a democracy or not – this necessitates a look at process-orientated approach.

d. Process-oriented Approach

In contradistinction to the constitutional, substantive and procedural ways of defining democracy, this approach is an amalgamation of processes that must be continuously in motion for a system of governance to be termed democratic. Robert Dahl acknowledges that there is an enormous and impenetrable thicket of ideas regarding democracy from which he identifies five criteria for process-oriented approach as follows:

1. *Effective participation.* Before a policy is adapted by the association, all members must have equal and effective opportunities for making their views known to the other members as to what the policy should be.

2. *Voting equality.* When the moment arrives at which the decision about policy will finally be made, every member must have an equal and effective opportunity to vote, and all votes must be counted as equal.
3. *Enlightened understanding.* Within reasonable limits as to time, each member must have equal and effective opportunities for learning about the relevant alternative policies and their likely consequences.
4. *Control of the agenda.* The members must have the exclusive opportunity to decide how and, if they choose, what matters are to be placed on the agenda. Thus the democratic process required by the three preceding criteria is never closed. The policies of the association are always open to change by members, if they so choose.
5. *Inclusion of adults.* All, or at any rate most, adult permanent residents should have the full rights of citizens that are implied by the first four criteria (Dahl, 1998:37-38)

As already pointed out, Dahl's criteria differ in meaningful ways from the constitutional, substantive and procedural yardsticks for democracy. By avoiding building social prerequisites and consequences into the definition, Dahl specifies no constitutional provisions. His enlightened understanding refers to experience within the organisation rather than consequences or prerequisites (Tilly, 2007:9). It is argued here that enlightened understanding is a necessary component of deliberation which is a *conditio sine qua non* for democracy.

Dahl's conception of modern representative democracy – which he terms “polyarchal democracy” – is that which consists of political institutions that endure. He identifies those institutions as: elected official; free, fair and frequent elections; freedom of expression; access to alternative sources of information; associational autonomy; as well as inclusive citizenship¹³.

¹³ For further insights into this see (Dahl, 1998:85; 2005:188-189).

In view of the foregoing consideration, this study holds that the process-oriented approaches to the definition of democracy lead to a more plausible conception as to what democracy actually entails. What defines democracy should be the extent to which the parties involved accept the end result about the issue at hand. This certainly implies that some people may have to convincingly sacrifice their stance in order to adopt a different position. It is in such a situation that the process through which they arrive at such decision, counts over and above the end decision itself. According to Ake, this approach is preferred to the rest because “It is the involvement in the process than the acceptability of the end decision, which satisfies the right to participate” (Ake, 1993:43). In consequence, this calls for an attempt at a precise definition of democracy.

1.2.2 *Definition of democracy*

Frederic Schaffer in his book *Democracy in Transition: Understanding Politics in an Unfamiliar Culture*, holds the view that:

The concept of democracy itself can be so stretched so widely that it rarely appears without a modifier – pluralist, direct, liberal, participatory, representative or the like (Schaffer, 2000:1).

In respect to Schaffer’s view, it can be pointed out that a definition of democracy should qualify *ipso facto* – to the minute detail – the type of democracy one is referring to. As a result, Ivor Jennings observes in her (his?) book *Democracy in Africa*, that an attempt to define democracy often leads to the conclusion that there are several forms of democratic government; and also there are several forms of governments that are called democratic (Jennings, 1963:33). Undoubtedly, both Schaffer and Jennings do not offer us any definition of democracy as such. Nevertheless, they raise the awareness that the nature of democracy is a complex one; and that it is dependent on social and cultural contexts, at least going by Jennings’ observation. This, however, still leaves the innocent question of what democracy is, unresolved.

The word ‘democracy’ etymologically derives from the Greek word *demokratia* that can be broken down into *demos* meaning ‘the people’ and *kratos* meaning ‘rule’. Literally, therefore, the term “democracy” translates to ‘rule by the people’¹⁴. This literal meaning of democracy is the most basic and the most widely used definition.

While it is noted that this definition spells out the centrality of people to the understanding of democracy, it requires one major amendment from the onset. This amendment is occasioned by the fact that when we speak of democracy in a large scale nation-state, the acts of government are usually performed *not* by the populace but rather indirectly by the representatives whom they freely elect on equal basis. Consequently, as Arend Lijphart observes, democracy may be defined not only as a government by the people but also as a government in accordance with the people’s preferences (Lijphart, 1984:1). That is to say, an ideal democratic government would be one whose actions are always in perfect correspondence with the preferences of all its citizens – a government that has a complete responsiveness to the populace.

While it can be advanced that no such government has ever existed, it is argued here that a government whose actions are in perfect correspondence with the preferences of all its citizens remains an ideal to which a democratic government should aspire. A government that continually aspires to meet the preferences of her *demos* by deed and not by sheer rhetoric can, thus, be regarded as true democracy. It is in this sense that the “people” as Kwame Gyekye argues, must remain the yardstick of defining democracy; that is, the degree of adequacy allowed for the expression of the will of the people; and the extent to which the people themselves are involved in the decision-making process (Gyekye, 1997:124).

¹⁴ ‘Rule by the people’ is a notion famous for multiple meanings. It appears as a modifier to the term democracy, but it does not set limits to how the term ‘democracy’ may be used. The translation of democracy as rule by the people implies decision making. Nevertheless, to primarily view democracy in this way covers only some of the meaning often assigned to the word (Catt and Hellena, 1999:4).

In view of the foregoing, democracy ought to generate hope and aspiration in the lives of the governed – by establishing, on the one hand, the principle of political equality, freedom and dignity; and on the other hand, by bringing about a concrete sense of empowerment and opportunity (Mehta, 2003:2).

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that this is what really confounds the true meaning of democracy to a greater or lesser extent – not all people in a democracy share the same aspirations. The landless peasantry, the internally displaced persons (IDPs), bonded labour, the untouchables of the society, middle-class lawyers who draw up a country's constitution – all have different aspirations and on this understanding, it is to be noted that the most fundamental features of democracy have turned out to be elusive in contemporary Africa, rendering democracy's hopes and aspirations at experimental crossroads. Resultantly, there is ever persistent social inequality and a mistaken view of a state's proper function and organisation. Arguably, these two factors have modified and impeded the workings of democracy and its effects in all kinds of perverse ways. What is at stake, therefore, is how to manage these disparities. In consequence, as Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze argues, democracy should be a form of:

...social framework that a people adopt in order to mediate the struggles and conflicts that necessarily arise from the necessarily competitive nature of individuated identities and desires (Eze, 1997:320).

In line with the foregoing, what counts as democracy or its instance thereof, in contemporary Africa, must not only literally take into account Dahl's five criteria for the process-oriented definition, but also in a more profound manner, consider the expansion of the same to encompass a form of consensus building and communal solidarity¹⁵. That is, as far as consensus is concerned, democracy must reflect deep mutual understanding. Such consensus may be the product of compromise ironed out

¹⁵ This explains why Wiredu argues that consensus as a political decision procedure requires that each representative should be persuaded not only as a matter of the optimality of each decision but also of its practical necessity, all things considered (Wiredu, 1996:189).

between hostile camps (Wiredu, 1996:186); or it may rise from a desire to conform to social norms (Schaffer, 2000:58). In this context, democracy should involve deliberation or consensual quality¹⁶.

Schaffer comes to the conclusion that democracy should, in all, be identified with community solidarity basically by considering a statement made by an elder in Ngabu village in Senegal regarding their understanding of *demokaraasi* that:

When there is work to do, we come together to do it. When someone falls ill, we come together to cultivate his field. If something happens to one of us, everybody helps him financially. When someone is sick, the women go to the well to fetch him water. That is our *demokaraasi* here in Ngabu (Schaffer, 2000:60).

The identification of democracy with a comprehensive form of community solidarity, as Schaffer further observes, simply means that democracy must involve the recognition of mutual dependence and the consequent importance of sharing responsibility for one another's wellbeing (Schaffer, 2000:61). From the way of life of the Ngabu people, it can be taken as glaring evidence in Africa that democracy does not mean spreading some foreign or Western systems of governance. While it may be argued against this point that such a democracy may only pass as a village type of democracy, which is ill suited for more advanced modern Africa, it is worth noting that the values that define it – mutual dependence and responsibility for one another's wellbeing – are the very ones that ought to define democracy even in a more advanced society such as modern Africa. Besides, it is such values that render democracy to be both legitimate and effective, and, therefore, worthy to observe.

¹⁶ It to be noted that what makes democracy possible is an underlying societal consensus. Dahl, for instance, wrote that “prior to politics, beneath it, enveloping it, restricting it, conditioning it, it is the underlying consensus on policy that usually exists in the society among the predominant portion of the politically active members. Without such a consensus, no democratic system would survive the endless irritations and frustrations of elections and party competition.” (Dahl, 1956:132).

In sum, it is to be noted that implicit in what passes as a plausible definition of democracy is its intrinsic value, which defines the whole question of its legitimacy and effectiveness in pursuit of the interests of the governed. In the section that follows, the study analyses how these elements can be realised and assessed in a democratic practice.

1.3 Legitimacy and effectiveness of democracy

I have argued that the true meaning of democracy should be hinged on its intrinsic value, which is what explains the fact of its legitimacy and effectiveness in pursuit of the interests of the governed. As such, it is both legitimacy and effectiveness that affect people's attitude toward democracy.

Goran Hyden, in his article "*The governance challenge in Africa*", provides a definition of both concepts. He outlines, on the one hand, that effectiveness refers to the actual performance of a system of government; that is, the extent to which democracy satisfies the basic fundamental functions of a government as both leaders and followers see it. On the other hand, he says, legitimacy involves the capacity of a system of government – democracy – to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate for the society (Hyden, 2000:11). What stands out from Hyden's definitions is that both concepts must not overlook the socio-cultural specificity of a people. To assume or overlook a people's concern and interest – their cultural and social orientation – may contribute to making democracy alien and incongruent – illegitimate and ineffective – to Africa's political needs.

Louis Jeevanantham and Gerard Hagg in the "preface" of the book *Governance in the 21st century*, capture the possible negative effect of such assumption when they write that:

Despite the attainment of political independence, Africa is largely in chains because the minds of its diverse peoples are enslaved to thoughts that are inimical to the continent's development and progress. Outsiders are quick to arrogate the

privilege to set the agenda of discourse on Africa's issues and challenges to themselves for selfish gains and advancements. By so doing, they circumscribe the discourse time and time again to the utmost disadvantage of the continent and its peoples (Jeevanantham and Hagg, 2011:xv).

They are, however, quick to add that “the time is therefore overdue...to reinvent Africa's discourse” (Jeevanantham and Hagg, 2011:xv). My reading and analysis of these views is that an understanding and establishment of democratic legitimacy is what may enable Africa to instantiate its own type of democracy – African democracy. This is a type of democracy which increases a state's capacity to provide robust institutions and implement policies that support the general wellbeing of the citizenry; that is, the type of democracy that provides answers to the questions with which Africans are bothered in contemporary times. Basically, these are the reduction of the modern state to a mere instrumental role and a set of resources that the rulers use to foster their power¹⁷. In consequence, Africans are concerned about how fiscal revenues are distributed to create networks of political support as rulers use public funds to finance political allegiance (Englebert, 2000:5). What is at stake, therefore, is legitimacy that ensures that the practice of democracy is responsive to the needs of the governed. In essence, democracy has failed to address the challenges of poverty, disease and illnesses, food security *et cetera* that Africans encounter in the everydayness of their existence.

It is in view of the foregoing that Kwandiwe Kondlo and Chinyengozi Ejiogu in their article titled “*Towards a 'new' consciousness about Africa's imperatives in the twenty-first century*” allude to the question of lack of legitimacy of democracy in post-colonial Africa. In a sense, they see democracy to be alien to the African context; and describe it as “the historically imposed predicament” (Kondlo and Ejiogu, 2011:xvii). In

¹⁷ See Pierre Englebert's view on what the challenge of modern states in Africa entails. He argues that the reduction of the modern state to a merely instrumental role may make leaders more likely to resort to patronage, nepotism, corruption and other patterns of political behaviour that can be all subsumed under neo-patrimonialism (Englebert, 2000:5).

consequence, democracy lacks the legitimacy it requires in order for the populace to appreciate its value.

In view of the foregoing arguments, the status of democracy in Africa can be said to be that of legitimacy-cum-effectiveness crisis. Nonetheless, the arguments so far advanced on the crisis of democratic legitimacy – other than prefiguring it – fail to state how to evaluate the phenomenon of legitimacy. In consequence, they fail to lay a foundation for what may pass as an African democracy. In other words, if democratic practice in post-independence Africa is actually a post-colonial predicament – illegitimate and ineffective for that matter – then the critical concern about what makes a democracy democratic remains unexplained. An analysis of how to deepen the roots of democracy – make it more legitimate and effective – so as to be responsive to the needs of the governed is, therefore, urgently called for.

Christiano Thomas, in the article titled “*The Authority of Democracy*”, likens *legitimacy* to authority of democracy and argues that it should be assessed following what he refers to as a dualistic account. That is, it should be based on two irreducible evaluation dimensions; first, is the tendency to produce good outcomes; and, second, it should be measured in terms of the quality of the democratic procedure (Thomas, 2004:266).

In response to Christiano Thomas, Steven Wall, in a debate article “*Democracy. Authority and Publicity*”, opposes the dualistic account. He instead proposes that democracy’s legitimacy should be assessed following only one account – based on the dimension of its outcome. He calls this one account Instrumentalist Monism (Wall, 2006:85). Wall argues that it is only instrumentalist monism that can guarantee holistic justification of democracy; that is, its directives are uniformly binding all who are subject to its authority such that “the reasons against its acceptance do not outweigh the reasons for its acceptance” (Wall, 2006:86).

Following this line of reasoning, one may advance that an appropriate democratic model for Africa should be that which is in pursuit of consensus building since decision-making in traditional African life and governance was by consensus (Wiredu, 1996:182). Arguably, therefore, such a model of democracy, which seeks consensus, is actually one that is premised on holistic justification. What this means is that authority of democracy is completely justified in Wall's context as opinions of all were sought before a decision could be reached, and when a decision was reached, there was neither a loser nor a winner in the strictest sense.

The decision reached normally served the common good; and so it was acceptable even by those who were initially opposed to it. This is the context of Wiredu's consensual democracy as defined by dialogue and willingness to give up one's position without forsaking the truth (Wiredu, 1996:183). Arguably, therefore, it can be deduced, as a matter of fact, that traditional African political decisions commanded holistic justification and not what Wall would call 'piecemeal justification'. By piecemeal justification, Wall means the bindingness of authoritative directive that is not uniform across the range of subjects to whom the directive applies (Wall, 2006:86). Piecemeal justification rightly applies to the practice of Western democracy whose authority lies in the mere aggregation of numbers – the principle of majoritarianism. This normally leaves the minority not only with their voices not heard, but also with their needs not met¹⁸.

Joshua Kassner, in the article "*Debate: Is everything really up for grabs? The relationship between democratic values and democratic process*", looks at Jeremy Waldron's argument that democratic legitimacy requires: 1) that all "good faith" political disagreements must be resolved through a democratically legitimate decision-making process; 2) for a decision-making process to be democratically legitimate it must

¹⁸ This point relies on Kwasi Wiredu's criticisms of majority opinion. See (Wiredu, 1996:186).

instantiate a fundamental democratic value – that each individual ought to be as a “separate moral agent with sense of justice.”¹⁹

In view of this, Kassner argues that an assessment of legitimacy of democracy and its corresponding effectiveness in any culture must follow both conceptual priority as well as normative priority (Kassner, 2006:484). That is, if we have to assess what passes as good ‘democratic practice’ – what makes democracy democratic – it is first and foremost important to understand what the concept ‘democracy’ itself is. This is what he underlines as a case of conceptual priority. That is, one concept is prior to another concept if an understanding of the latter requires the former (Kassner, 2006:484).

What Kassner appears to be pointing out is that it is improper to postulate whether democracy is legitimate or otherwise without first establishing the values associated with good democratic practices. For instance, following Kassner’s own illustration, one cannot understand what the concept “bicycle-race” means without first understanding what “bicycle” is as the prior concept. Resultantly, the values of democracy have a conceptual priority because they are the conditions under which democracy can be justifiably called democratic (Kassner, 2006:484).

It is, therefore, clear according to Kassner that to argue as Waldron would, that the determination of what it means to be democratic is dependent upon a decision-making process that must itself be democratic for its determination to have authority, would be a regression and misunderstanding of conceptual priority²⁰.

¹⁹ Waldron as quoted by Joshua Kassner (Kassner, 2006:483).

²⁰ This is one of the criticisms that Joshua Kassner labels against Jeremy Waldron’s understanding of conceptual priority and democratic legitimacy. See (Kassner, 2006:485).

In order to avoid such a misconception, Kassner proposes “Normative Priority” as a complementary assessment procedure to conceptual priority for what it is that passes as “democratic”. He argues that:

What should be valued in a democratic decision-making process is the degree to which the process protects and maintains the values of democracy and the right that instantiate such values (Kassner, 2006:492).

I am of the position that neither Wall’s view nor Kassner’s position can stand alone in determining democratic legitimacy in contemporary Africa. Thus, in combining Wall’s instrumentalist monism with Kassner’s conceptual priority as well as normative priority, it is possible to arrive at a workable criterion of determining both legitimacy and effectiveness of democracy in contemporary Africa which is *culture-centric*. Such criterion may need to:

...take into account not only how well political procedures yield correct outcomes over time for the issues for which they are designed to resolve, but also how they affect the welfare (in other ways) of those who are subject to them (Wall, 2006:95).

It is the maintenance of the values of democracy in a decision-making process, not the democratic process itself, which makes the directives of a democratic process praiseworthy. For example, if the majority, as is the case with Western type of democracy, decide that an individual does not have a right that previously he/she was presumed to have, then the process turns out to be a mere democratic-valueless procedure. This explains why Kassner further argues that:

A conception of democratic legitimacy that gives priority to a democratic process over the values the process is supposed to instantiate is one that fails to recognise the normative priority of the values of democracy (Kassner, 2006:494).

It can be advanced, therefore, that it is the maintenance of the values of democracy, not the democratic process itself, which makes democracy legitimate, effective or even praiseworthy for that matter. In other words, if adherence to a decision-making process or its directives is likely to undermine the values of democracy, as Kassner points out, then the process should be constrained or its outcome overridden (Kassner, 2006:494).

In sum, a plausible criterion for the legitimacy and effectiveness of democracy may need to point out how, irrespective of good outcomes, democracy may be ontologically, among other things, inclusive, just and fair, *et cetera*. This background and understanding of how to determine democratic legitimacy and effectiveness, offers the basis for understanding African democracy. Consequently, the study now pays attention to the nature and practice of democracy in the traditional African polity, and its subsequent bearing on modern democratic practice in Africa.

1.4 African democracy

In this section, as has already been alluded to above, the study focuses on the existence, nature and practice of African democracy in traditional polity and how it can be brought to bear on modern democracy. The guiding questions are: i) Does traditional Africa have a democracy; and what is its nature? ii) Of what relevance is such a democracy to contemporary democratic practice in Africa? To address these concerns, it is argued that it is a misconception that democracy must mean a Western-style of governance with individuals making decisions and issue-oriented interest groups lobbying for specific outcomes. Such a misconception overlooks the specificity of a people's cultural and social orientation. I suppose this may lead to a disregard of the way Africans traditionally or even democratically organised their lives. To this end, what matters most is to establish the nature of democracy that operated in traditional Africa.

1.4.1 *The traditional African democracy*

To begin with, Wiredu addresses himself to the nature of decision making in traditional Africa, which he says was by consensus²¹. He sees consensus as playing a key role not only in matters of political governance, but also as being the order of the day in African social interactions and deliberations (Wiredu, 1996:182). It is important to point out that Wiredu's conception of democracy by consensus is greatly influenced by the desire and search for an alternative political paradigm to the majoritarian – or multiparty – democracy, which among other things, he sees as characterised by competitive power struggles rendering it too adversarial, aggressive and divisive; and resultantly, harmful to the post-colonial African polities (Wiredu, 1996:187).

It is against the foregoing consideration that Wiredu makes a compelling case for a “radical” and “thorough-going” consensus mode of democracy. He argues that in traditional Africa consensus was axiomatic for joint action – the pursuit of which “was a deliberate effort to go beyond decision by the majority opinion” (Wiredu, 1996:186). Majority opinion, he argues, is a mere aggregation of numbers making it easier to achieve and less preferred to consensus. To stress this point, Wiredu gives an example of the Ashanti community that he argues pursued consensus as a preferred option to majority opinion because it offered the least resistance in a given matter of decision-making. He writes:

To them, majority opinion is not in itself a good enough basis for decision making, for it deprives the minority of the right to have their will reflected in the given decision. Or, to put it in terms of the concept of representation, it deprives the minority of the right of representation in the decision in question. (Wiredu, 1996:186).

²¹ The notion of democracy by consensus as conceived by Kwasi Wiredu is a primal attempt of reaching out to Africa's traditional past for an alternative democratic paradigm to the majoritarian type of modern times. It has generated a lot of debate and even criticisms from many scholars and African philosophers – notably, Emmanuel Eze Chukwudi, Joe Teffo, Edward Wamala, and Bernard Matolino among others. Nevertheless, it is not within the scope of this study to respond to such criticisms labelled against consensual democracy.

It is to be pointed out that what makes consensus to be a preferred democratic political option for Africa to the majoritarian type is that it – consensus – operated in such a manner that it did not place any one group of persons consistently in the position of a minority as is common with the majoritarian democracies of modern times²². While consensus does not guarantee a total agreement, the most important thing to note is that the interlocutors at a discussion may reach an agreement on what ought to be done without forsaking their opinion about what is true.

In Wiredu's own words:

...consensus usually presupposes an original position of diversity. Because issues did not always polarize opinion on lines of strict contradictoriness, dialogue can function, by means, for example, of the soothing of edges, to produce compromises that are agreeable to all or, at least, not obnoxious to any. Furthermore, where there is the will to consensus, dialogue can lead to a willing suspension of disagreement, making possible agreed actions without necessarily agreed notions (1996:183).

It is in this connection that democracy by consensus ensured that the interest of either group was catered for – be they in the minority or otherwise. This is basically because consensual democracy guaranteed a substantive representation that went over and above mere formal representation²³. In consequence, it ensured that each person was represented not only in council but also in counsel in any matter to his interest or those of their groups (Wiredu, 1996:186). In sum, I suppose that what makes consensus an important element in democratic practice is its concern not with the good of oneself, but rather the good of the whole – the common good.

²² Majoritarian democracy as a “tyranny of numbers” in most modern democracies operate in such a way that larger communities in a multi-ethnic society come together in a coalition to win an election. By so doing, they render smaller ethnic communities to be in perpetual political limbo.

²³ For a detailed analysis of the two kinds of representations see Wiredu (1996:186).

In his book *African Indigenous Political ideology: Africa's cultural Interpretation of Democracy*, David Maillu argues that traditional Africa had a democracy whose roots were embedded in the communal life of the people – it was a kind of democracy which made it possible for everyone to enjoy life and be concerned with everyone else's wellbeing (Maillu, 1997:239). It is to be pointed out that what Maillu holds as the true nature of African democracy is sensitivity and responsibility, which characterise concern for other people's wellbeing.

According to Maillu, in the traditional African polity, democracy was realised in loving one's neighbour as oneself. As such, it was a democracy which provided the poor people with an opportunity to be heard and to be given the help they deserved (Maillu, 1997:239).

In view of the foregoing, it is argued that African traditional democracy was so imbued with the way of life of the Africans that it was defined by their very traditional social structure as Naomi Mitchison writes:

There are no loose ends in tribal society. Everyone is held in a network of relationships.... It makes for closeness, for social classes staying as they are, for carefully exclusive systems of aid and occupation. The orphan and the aged will have some place in it. The sick will not be entirely neglected. Everybody may be undernourished, but few will starve (Mitchison, 1970:60).

In his article titled “*Africa and the prospects of deliberative democracy*”, Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani sees African traditional democracy as that which is hinged on the culture of deliberation of the Africans. He argues for a deliberative²⁴ type of democracy as

²⁴ Deliberative democracy can be equated with consensual democracy. The process of achieving both lies in the recognition of other members' “deliberative capacity”. That is, in deliberation or consensus building, human beings owe one another the reasons for their proposals (see Ani 2013:211, Wiredu 1996:182-190).

characteristic of the traditional African polity (Ani, 2013:207). For Ani, the modern state in Africa lacks the art of deliberation since, unfortunately so, it is defined by an inherited colonial type of aggregative democracy. He writes:

The emergence of the modern state structure, which can often encompass a multiplicity of traditional societies, is a development that has extended the social arena beyond the boundaries of the immediate traditional community into a multiethnic society. This sociospatial extension was not accompanied by an equal extension of deliberative institutions, since the modern state inherited the aggregative democracy of colonial masters (Ani, 2013:207)

Ani underscores the importance of deliberation in the practice of democracy in traditional African polity. He argues that it was a mechanism for sustaining inclusivity in primordial African societies. However, its lack thereof in modern democracies has led to “the aggregative pitting of societies, ethnicities, political ideologies, and even religious worldviews against each other” (Ani, 2013:207). It is in view of the foregoing that it can be argued that there is an urgent need for deliberation to ameliorate the current democratic practice in Africa. Again Ani underscores this urgency by pointing out that “Without a deliberative culture, aggregative democracy stands the danger of translating into a self-defeating technocracy” (2013:2008). This necessitates a look into how African democracy was practiced.

1.4.2 The practice of African democracy

This section delves into the practice of democracy in traditional African polity. Building on Ani’s concept of deliberation, I seek to make particular reference to the practice of consensual democracy; and argue that the practice of African democracy primarily requires the act of deliberation. That is, it is deliberation that legitimises the practice of democracy in any polity. This is because, as Ani rightly points out, deliberation is pegged on the understanding that each member of the society must recognise others’ deliberative capacity and that we owe one another reasons for our proposals (Ani, 2013:213).

In addressing the practice of African democracy, Wiredu focuses on the question of how consensual democracy worked by referring to the Ashanti traditional political system. He notes that every clan was the basic political unit of the Ashanti system. He writes:

Every such unit has a head, and every such head is automatically a member of the council, which is the governing body of the town or village. The qualifications for lineage headship are seniority in age, wisdom, a sense of civic responsibility and logical persuasiveness (Wiredu, 1996:184).

This is why Wiredu places the responsibility of lineage headship in the hands of a chief. Nowhere in traditional Africa was a chief a young, inexperienced and unwise individual. On the contrary, the chief was a senior member of the community whose wisdom revolved around concern for the common good of his kinsmen and women. In the discharge of his functions, the chief presided over the council not as a superior member or final arbiter, but as a symbol and expression of consensus reached by the councillors. In relation to his councillors, the chief was simply the *primus inter pares*, the first among equals, who facilitated consensus building on matters of communal interest before the council. As Wiredu notes, the chief's personal word was not law (Wiredu, 1996:185).

According to Wiredu consensus operated at all levels of government; its workability made possible by it being a premeditated option. That is, the ultimate *focus* of consensus is the common good based on the belief that the interest of all members of a society is the same, although their immediate perceptions of those interests may be different. Resultantly, the attainment of communal good is based on dialogue made possible by the innate ability of human beings to cut through their differences to their "rock bottom of identity interests" (Wiredu, 1996:185).

The Ashanti valued rational discussion since logical persuasiveness was a prerequisite to holding office. In Wiredu's view this is what primarily made consensus attractive to

democracy. Besides, it encompassed both formal and substantive representation. It was *not* a party system of government based on a mere sway of the majority. Rather it was a government of *participation in* power and not appropriation of and competition in power by the majority. All in all, consensus is cooperation not confrontation – a radical *decision* to go beyond the majority opinion to represent the minority in the final outcome (Wiredu, 1996:186-187). Wiredu's argument is practical in the sense that the practice of Western democracy has increased competition for power without at the same time increasing inclusiveness. It is this lack of inclusivity that, in my view, undermines Western democracy. In line with these arguments, it is crucial to look at how consensus can be brought to bear on modern democratic practice in Africa.

1.4.3 *Relevance of African democracy*

Having looked at how African democracy worked, it is important to look at its bearing on modern democratic practice in Africa. Proponents²⁵ of African democracy argue that the challenges of modern democracy in Africa – majoritarian or aggregative – relate to the form of decision-making which, based on mere aggregation of numbers, ends up creating cleavages in every sphere of political life. Ani particularly notes that:

Preoccupation with multiparty aggregative democracy in Africa has produced superficial forms of political/electoral choice making by subjects that deepen pre-existing ethnic and primordial cleavages (2013:207)

This challenge is further compounded by the fact that aggregative democracy regards voting²⁶ as the basic standard for decision-making, instead of its usual function of being a last resort in cases of intractability (Ani, 2013:208). Wiredu sees voting in modern African polity as a foreign political import – the hinge upon which majoritarian

²⁵ Mostly Kwasi Wiredu and Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani.

²⁶ Ani recognises the existence of intractability in every sphere of life making voting a basic human solution to it (see Ani, 2013:208). Wiredu does not share this view and sees voting as a unfortunate foreign political imposition (see Wiredu 1996:184)

democracy turns – leading to a government of “consent” without consensus (Wiredu, 1996:183-184). In view of this, I argue that it is not gainsaying that modern democracies so characterised by heterogeneity, need to incorporate the art of deliberation for the realisation of national integration. Besides, deliberation plays a key role in this, since firstly, it is a process in which the members of a political community participate in public discussion and critical examination of communally binding public policies and not the pursuit of some individual interests.

Secondly, following logically from the first point above, the process of deliberation through which these policies are reached is not just a model of political bargaining, but a commitment to the common good. The very nature of deliberation demands that the interests of no particular member of the polity have *a priori* precedence over those of any other (Valdez, 2001:30). This explains why Wiredu argues that consensus, as a procedure of political decision, requires persuasion of each representative not only of the optimality of each decision, but also of the practical necessity (1996:89).

In respect to the political rhetoric of modern democracies where politicians campaign promising heaven without the potentiality of delivering the sky, it is important that consensus is brought to bear. This is because consensual democracy as is the case with deliberative democracy is based on rationality and it aims at truth. As Matolino notes:

...the dialogue is aimed at rendering bare the opposing views, understanding their content and aims; and most crucially the dialogue would be directed at building bridges between disparate opinions (Matolino, 2009:40).

My reading of Matolino is that he is basically alluding to the force of argument in consensus building as having the most weight as opposed to mere political rhetoric and empty persuasions of politicians. The context of understanding may be interpreted to mean that consensus is not manipulative and coercive, and is not an emotive appeal for fostering sectarian or jingoistic interests of politicians in modern times. Rather, it is a

willingness to modify their proposals on the basis of the most complete and compelling information available.

The process of consensus building provides consensual democracy with a foundation of political legitimacy. Since consent is at the centre of democratic decision making, consensus remains the vehicle through which the populace can justify self-imposed laws and policies that are communally binding (Valadez, 2001:32). Consensual democracy refines the process of autonomous self-governance by placing conditions on the deliberative process, which ensures that the outcomes of deliberation do not merely aggregate existing desires but reflect a higher degree of collective knowledge and mutual responsibility. The political legitimacy of consensual outcomes is based not merely on the will of the majority, but on the results of collective reasoned reflection, which respects the moral and practical concerns of all the populace.

In sum, consensus is a *conditio sine qua non* for the realisation of cohesion in modern democracies in order to ward off the challenge of mere aggregation of numbers – of the majority over the minority – which, in Wiredu’s own conception is the quintessence of uncooperativeness, an epiphenomenon of colonialism, and antithetical to the spirit of communalism (Wiredu, 2010:1060-1).

The understanding of African democracy, its various features, and how it operated in the traditional polity begs a consideration of the challenges that democracy faces today. An outline of such challenges may provide a common launching pad upon which African traditional political values may be brought to bear on contemporary democratic practice in Africa.

1.5 Challenges to democracy in Africa: an outline

In this section, the study presents a critical overview of the democratic challenges in Africa. It is noted that we have reached a point in history where democracy faces serious threats not only in the developing world – Africa – but also in the developed ones where it has been established for centuries (Pardo and Schwartz, 2007:15). That is to say, there are new and powerful developments the world over, which not only jeopardise but also significantly determine how democracies perform. Such developments – terrorism, globalisation, worldwide economic depression - are, as Jose´ Pardo and Pedro Schwartz point out, just among a few threats to the practice of democracy in the world today (Pardo and Schwartz, 2007:15). Nevertheless, as Abdulahi Osman observes, a great majority of diagnosis of what ails Africa, and particularly Africa’s democratic challenge in contemporary times, rightly points to “political institutions and their failure to sustain governance that is supposed to spark social and economic development” (Osman, 2008:127).

That there is discontent of postcolonial democracy in Africa is, therefore, not in doubt. While the practices of popular authority, elections and public discussion – in the form of media briefing – are entrenched in the exercise of power, modern democratic practice in Africa is far from producing models of governance that the populace can freely accept. It can be argued that the democratic practice has simply failed to produce the kind of social order of the African traditional political *modus vivendi*. The concept of political equality, for instance, is fiercely contested in most circumstances. As a result, the politics of the belly²⁷ – where a selfish attitude is best captured in the phrase “it is our time to eat”²⁸ – reproduces inequality through structures of racism, ethnicity and patriarchy that the African society does not exemplify to an unconscionable degree (Mehta, 2003:38). In this case, inequality becomes an existential burden that inflicts psychic costs by diminishing a sense of self. That is, when inequality imposes the profoundest burdens – by denying individuals the minimum regard due to them - it leaves an indelible mark and sense of political discontent (Mehta, 2003:38-9). This leads to a perpetual desire for true democracy, which in essence, is a perpetual desire to have

²⁷ For more information on “politics of the belly” see (Patrick Chabal, 2009).

²⁸ This attitude is expressive of neo-patrimonialism politics where an individual rules by dint of personal prestige and power granting favours to his relatives and political cronies without following “the rules of the game”. See (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997:61ff).

one's moral worth²⁹ recognised in a democratic setting. In view of the foregoing, it can be pointed out that inequality in democracy leads to lack of legitimacy and internal cohesion of most post-colonial polities in Africa.

The lack of democratic legitimacy has also created another challenge for democracy in Africa; that is, the underlying assumption that democratic practice *ipso facto* leads to economic development. Nevertheless, a look at the living and social conditions of African peoples reveals a deteriorating trend. This raises a fundamental question about the meaning of democratic practice in Africa. It renders the democracy-development continuum invalid. There are many autocratic countries in Africa perpetuating poverty and oppression. In fact, according to Pratap, this points to a greater challenge of the persistent gap between the outcomes that people expect from the government, on the one hand, and the government's capacity to attend to their wellbeing on the other (Pratap, 2003:35). In this regard, there is also the gap between increased demand of accountability and reflective effectiveness.

According to Osaghae, another challenge associated with the practice of Western democracy in Africa relates to the fact that Western democracy thrives dangerously on the exclusivist politics of winner-takes-all. He asserts that this requires a reassessment of democratic practice (Osaghae, 1999:17-18). Evidently in a multi-ethnic democracy, there is a need for values of tolerance and consultation as well as principles of power-sharing, decentralisation, political inclusivity, *et cetera*, which are in short supply in modern democracy in Africa.

All in all, it can be advanced that there is, generally, the faltering of democratisation in Africa with delegitimizing and other attenuating effects on the establishment of true

²⁹ It is to be noted that one's moral worth in Africa is to be understood in its communal matrix. The individual is in constant dialogical and relational inclusivity with the community. As such the individual is a participant in the lives of others. See Augustine Nwoye's, "*Remapping the Fabric of African Self: A Synoptic Theory*" (2006:128-9).

democratic regimes occasioned by failure to grant equality of access to state-controlled resources to the various groups (Osaghae, 1999:15).

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter set out, first and foremost, to provide a concise overall view of what democracy entails. It specifically unravelled the meaning of “democracy”, and pointed out that the concept attracts many a definition. As such, it is not possible to cover each and every aspect of democracy. In Dahl’s own description of the multiplicity of democracy’s meanings “the term democracy is like an ancient kitchen midden packed with assorted leftovers from twenty-five hundred years of continuous usage” (Dahl, 1982:5). Thus, the chapter has attempted to indicate and clarify some of the key points concerning the nature of the concept of democracy and its relationship to the political systems with which is associated. This attempt is worthwhile not because democracy is important, but rather that considerations of the concept of democracy and its relationship with political reality, is fraught with difficulty and confusion.

As such, when properly conceived – of course as an ideal – democracy must satisfy certain criteria, which ensure collective participation, availability of choice, or diminished inequality. Democratic principles can be expressed in a variety of institutional forms, including those that embody cultural preferences derived from African traditions. That is, true democracy can be realised through mutuality, or achievement of consensus, or solidarity.

Against the foregoing, it was underscored that in Africa – as should also be the case with other societies – democracy is unlikely to work, or to endure, unless it is compatible with the fundamental beliefs of the people. In consequence, the legitimacy of democracy derives from the principle of popular sovereignty. That is, ordinary citizens are equally endowed with the right and ability to govern themselves. In disregard of this fact, democracy is bound to face challenges of deep uneasiness by the populace about its actual workings – illegitimacy – signaling an apparent ambiguous future.

Furthermore, democratic legitimacy in Africa can only be achieved when the people fully participate in its creation through a deliberative process of consensus building that allows for their fundamental values to be revealed. Resultantly, there is a need to jettison the mistaken assumption that Western typologies of democracy transplanted in Africa during the colonial period, carry with them the seed of liberation for Africa's socio-political maladies. It is on this account that the study takes an in-depth critical and analytical assessment of the failure of democracy in contemporary Africa in the succeeding chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

FAILURE OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

As long as the locus of accountability is externally located and democratization is approached by the elites simply as an opportunity for power competition, so long will the establishment of the democratic regimes remain a mirage in Africa.

[Eghosa Osaghae, *Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Faltering Prospects, New Hopes*, 1999]

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a philosophical account of the failure of democracy in Africa. It is argued that variants of colonial democracies as they operated in the West and how they were transplanted in Africa are responsible for the failure of democracy in Africa today. Since Western democracy is basically at variance with African cultural political values, it is argued here that the main problems that are associated with democratic practice in Africa – illegitimacy and ineffectiveness – are a result of the European disregard of the African traditional political values. These problems have exacerbated rather than reduced the disjuncture between the political elites and the state on the one hand, and society and ordinary people – the masses – on the other in modern democracies in Africa. It is on this understanding that the following section gives an analysis of the colonial antecedent of the challenges of democracy in Africa today.

2.2 The Colonial antecedent

The emergence of European democracy, as Charles Tilly points out, resulted from moments in the revolutions of the 1840s when new regimes temporarily installed both representative legislatures and general male suffrage. That is, the essence of European democracy is best defined and explained by their experience with adult suffrage and elections. Tilly further points out that within this historical context of the installation of European democracy, authoritarian regimes also emerged sapping the legislative power without necessarily eliminating its election component (Tilly, 2004:214).

However, the European democratisation outside Europe, as scholars point out, was carried out through colonisation, conquest, confrontation and revolution, thereby promoting both democracy and tyranny (Albernethy, 2000:55-60). In consequence, the introduction of European democracy in Africa was, as Monica Flores argues:

...framed within a history of European violent colonization over most parts of the planet, traditionally interpreted by enlightened Europeans as a historical mission to [politically] civilise the world (Flores, 2005:5).

This perspective explains why by the midpoint of the nineteenth century, the European political elite had accepted the civilising logic of imperialism as propagated by the intellectual class. European empires were justified on the basis of good government and the transmission through education of civilising values. Resultantly, as Nana Poku and Anna Mdee correctly point out, Africa would only exist in the European mind as the barbaric other – creating an avenue of politics of dominance to be pursued against people of difference (Poku and Mdee, 2011:12).

The emerging problem of democratic practice in Africa, therefore, as Eghosa Osaghae observes, is informed by such history and experience, which supports the colonial mission by the universal claim that only European or Western democracy can yield better political governance (Osaghae, 1999:10). It is advanced here that Western democracy is dangerously hinged on the assumption of racial superiority on which the

whole edifice of colonial administration depended. This has led to different political-cum-social stratifications of modern society as a way of occupying and articulating power and status.

The colonial exercise of power – directly or indirectly – also led to daunting democratic problems in Africa. The direct rule involved the replacement of African traditional authority with the rule by white administration whose officers were sent from the metropole (Poku and Mdee, 2011:13). This, arguably, led to the breakdown of African traditional power structures. Conversely, where indirect rule³⁰ was prominent, a local oligarchy was subsumed and made reliant upon the metropole. This had two effects; firstly, for the colonial regime, it was cheaper to administer and had the effect of boxing African people into ethnic or ‘tribal’ units³¹. Secondly, the local oligarchy became an autocratic organ of imposition of colonial power. Through corporation with traditional leadership, particularly in the rural areas, the colonial regimes were able to withhold modernising influences applied in the colonies from other parts of the country, sowing the seed for political mistrust and inter-group rivalry (Poku and Mdee, 2011:18).

All in all, authority was invariably located in remote European-style new urban places for economic expediency. That is to say, the colonial administration removed itself from those regions and peoples, which at least formally, were not deemed economically viable (Poku and Mdee, 2011:18). This, arguably, is what has led to disregard of certain constituencies not considered viable either in terms of votes or in terms of economic gain in modern democracies in Africa. It can be held against the foregoing that nothing else can better account for the unbridled disregard and neglect– as far as development is concerned – of certain regions in Africa’s contemporary democratic practice.

³⁰ Indirect rule was mainly found in the rural areas, which places the Europeans considered unsuitable for farming and settlement. Such places were regarded as lacking in substantial resources such as minerals, thus they were hardest to permeate by the colonial administrative machine due to the paucity of resources. See (Poku and Mdee, 2011:17).

³¹ On this ground it is held among scholars that ethnicity was a great colonial invention that involved ascribing monolithic identities for colonialists’ own interest (Ranger, 1996; Vail, 1993).

Kwame Gyekye also sees functionality problems of democracy in contemporary Africa as having their roots in colonial epistemic orientation. He argues that “political institutions that were bequeathed to the African people by colonial rulers...modeled on those colonial rulers, did not function properly” (Gyekye, 1997:115). In line with Gyekye’s argument, Kwandiwe Kondlo and Chinenyengozi Ejiogu underscore the fact that colonial mentality is to blame for the failure of democratic governance in the post-colonial contemporary Africa. They observe that the arbitrary manner in which European powers carved up the continent into colonial states produced enduring negative implications on democratic practice as such. They write:

The deliberate disregard by the European colonisers for those African nationalities whose normatively democratic institutions they found incompatible with the colonial project they erected throughout the continent...helped to create negative consequences for governance in post-colonial contemporary Africa (Kondlo and Ejiogu, 2011:xix).

Against the foregoing, it is important to look at the nature of Western democracies, and how they operated or do operate in Africa in the twenty-first century. My focus is liberal democracy as the commonly practiced type of democracy in Africa together with its associated aftermath, directed democracy.

2.2.1 The consequence of liberal democracy

To begin with, there is liberal democracy wherein the powers of government are limited by laws and citizens enjoy freedom of association to compete for office in free elections at regular intervals. John Stuart Mill is regarded as the father of modern liberal democratic theory. He conceived liberal democracy to be of a representative type. Such a democracy, he observed, should give people the most important liberties: freedom of conscience, thought and feeling, holding and expressing opinions, pursuing one’s life plans and combining with others for any (non-ulterior) motive. He particularly argued,

as far as democracy is concerned, that direct citizen participation in the affairs of government should be encouraged so as to engender confidence in them about their ability to govern themselves and of developing intellectual talents and communal, moral values. Nonetheless, given the nature of large societies, he thought that the ideal typology of a perfect government would be representative democracy (Mill, 1991a [1861]:256). All in all, major characterisation of liberal democracy entails both participation and equality. These elements constitute what Mill himself regards as the ‘pure idea of democracy’. That is ‘government of the whole people, by the whole people, equally represented’, which requires proportional representation so as not to deny the minority the right to governmental representation (Mill, 1991a [1861]:302-3).

In Africa, the experience with liberal democracy was more pronounced in the so-called “third wave of democratisation”³² of the 1990s. This wave, arguably, contributed to some notable changes on the continent. In 1994, for example, it marked the end of apartheid and inauguration of majority rule in South Africa; and as Victor Adetulla observes, it led to the expansion of political space in a number of one-party states – leading to the end of personal rule of some “leaders” notably, Mobutu Sese Seko in then Zaire, Hastings Kamuzu Banda in Malawi, Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia (Adetulla, 2011:15) and Daniel arap Moi in Kenya. Liberal democracy helped to put an end to authoritarian and dictatorial regimes; and today the continent lives in and celebrates the era of multi-party elections.

In spite of these apparent positive developments, I argue that the practice of liberal democracy in contemporary Africa has produced more political contradictions than solutions. For instance, the success of multi-racial elections in post-apartheid South Africa, as elsewhere on the continent, has not guaranteed the incorporation of all social groups into the democratic system. The phenomenon of multiparty elections in Africa often leads to a sense of political disaffection that ordinarily manifests itself in

³² Susanna D. Wing in her book, *Constructing democracy in Africa: Mali in Transition*, underscores that the “third wave of democracy” in Africa actually began in 1989; and despite the many changes including adopting new constitutions, only a handful of states in Africa have laid groundwork for “more democratic” polities (Wing, 2008:1).

violence.³³ As a result, there is an apparent tendency of leaning toward power-sharing arrangements after “stolen” or “sham” elections. This, as Adetulla rightly observes, leads to deep questioning of the commitment of Africa’s new found democracies to constitutionalism and rule of law – perceived key tenets of liberal democracy (Adetulla, 2011:15). My thinking is that this is a pointer to the fact that democracy requires more than periodic holding of elections.

The equation of multi-party elections with democracy has led to very dubious outcomes in contemporary Africa. Claude Ake argues that liberal democracy is not in the least emancipatory especially in African conditions since it offers the people rights they cannot exercise, voting that never amounts to choosing, freedom that is patently spurious, and political equality that distinguishes highly unequal power relations (Ake, 1996:6). It can be advanced following Ake’s argument that the existence of multiple parties and the conduct of periodic elections in Africa is neither a sufficient precondition nor a reliable indicator of democracy. The conduct of periodic elections, in the final analysis, boils down to a “leader” being declared the winner of elections by an institution³⁴ instead of being chosen, that is, upholding the choice of the people. In most cases the phenomena of post-election violence that abound on the continent arise from such realities.

The concern of liberal democracy primarily with elections – how elections determine who will be in a position to exercise state power – is indifferent to the character of the

³³ Multi-party elections in Africa have not led to democracy that the people desire. For instance, despite the Nigerian successful ‘second transition’ following 2003 elections, the case of 2007 agitation for democracy dividends, paints a rather gloomy picture. Kenya’s disputed elections in 2007 which triggered violence resulting in many deaths after the then incumbent, President Mwai Kibaki allegedly ‘stole’ the elections; the Zimbabwean 2008 violence triggered by election flaws and human rights abuses – leading to a power sharing deal between President Robert Mugabe and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) – all these point to a continent in deficiency of democracy and, at best, still agitating for “*democracy dividends*” (Lewis and Alemika, 2005:vi).

³⁴ Mostly there are electoral bodies, for example, Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) in Kenya; whose final announcement of election results is not only official but also final regardless of whether such declaration goes counter to the people’s choice as is usually the case. The problems associated with such institutions are anybody’s guess. In most cases such electoral bodies are compromised by incumbent leadership right from the way they are constituted; as a result the peoples’ choice in an election is sacrificed on the altar of political expediency and interest of the incumbent.

state in Africa. It has produced a social context that has continued to work against the emergence of true democracy – further immersing the state in social contradictions – that render it unable to effectively be responsive to the needs of the populace. In a situation where the leadership of a state is given to the ‘popular’ as opposed to the ‘competent’, the interest of the majority is most likely to undermine the common good; and this leads to lack of justice and accountability on the part of the ruler to the governed. This eventually leads to a total lack of democracy *per se*, which manifests itself in the form of a directed dictatorship-type of democracy.

2.2.2 The consequence of directed democracy

A second type of democracy in contemporary Africa – a sequel of liberal democracy, so to speak – is the one that accepts the principle that rulers should be accountable to the governed, but is dispensed, all the same, with the political method of multiparty electoral competition. This type of democracy, which, I choose to call directed democracy³⁵, is a form of directed dictatorship. It is government by “guardians” of public wealth who normally insist upon political uniformity. It is to be noted that political uniformity, by its very nature, leads to an obvious problem of too little democracy within political parties. Jose´ Casas Pardo and Pedro Schwartz attest to this very problem, which they see as apparently responsible for the placement of incompetent people in positions of leadership.

They write:

To begin with, their members include only a small fraction of the population. In addition, the means of becoming a leader of a political party (and therefore, a potential ruler) is generally rather undemocratic: maneuvering, being subservient to the

³⁵ The term directed democracy is adapted from Richard L. Sklar in his article “*Democracy in Africa*” (Sklar 1983:12-13).

people above, creating power groups within the party, being photogenic and so on. Generally speaking, elected leaders are not necessarily the most able ones (Pardo and Schwartz, 2007:17).

It is to be noted, therefore, that this model of democracy can be equated to the aggregative model in which individuals in the polity have varying preferences about what they want government to do. Besides, they know too that other individuals also have their own preferences – competing interests – which may or may not match theirs. Thus, the sole goal of democracy is reduced to deciding what leaders, rules and policies will, at best, correspond to the most widely and strongly held preferences (Young, 2007:19). Arguably, this amounts to the populace behaving strategically by re-orienting their tactics to their perceptions of the activities of competing preferences.

The emerging problem associated with such behaviour is simple; the outcome of both elections and legislative decisions reflects the mere aggregation of the “strongest” or the most widely held preferences among the populace. This definitely puts in great conflict the question of democracy and justice. About this phenomenon, Young rightly postulates that:

While some preferences may be motivated by self-interest, others by altruistic care for others, and still others by a sense of fair play, the aggregative model offers no means of distinguishing among such motives. There are no criteria for distinguishing the quality of preferences by their content, origin or motive. [...] this model values some [preferences] more than others only extrinsically according to how many or few hold them or how strongly (Young, 2007:20).

Against this backdrop, democracy in contemporary Africa only passes as a mechanism for identifying and aggregating the preferences of the populace in order to learn which of those preferences are held in the greatest number or with the greatest intensity. This leads to a situation whereby the citizens adhere to their own preferences without the

possibility of interacting with those of opposing views. Besides, it yields to a common political phenomenon in contemporary Africa, namely, the influence of opinion polls by politicians. Politicians – as opposed to statesmen – rule by dint of preferences of the public irrespective of whether the outcomes of such preferences would be reasonable and good for the community or not (Pardo and Schwartz, 2007:18). This sacrifices deliberation on the altar of jingoistic interests of a group with no possibility of political coordination and cooperation, which are central to true democracy (Young, 2007:20).

John Dryzek sees another problem associated with this aggregative model of democracy as carrying a thin and individualistic form of rationality. He argues that the model is sceptical about the possibility of normative and evaluative objectivity. It denies that people can make claims on others about what is good or just, or can defend such claims objectively without appealing to the subjective preferences or interests of themselves (Dryzek, 1990:125).

In consequence, aggregative democracy offers no motivational basis for accepting as legitimate the outcomes of a democratic process. The outcome normally reflects the most widely held preferences, and so there is no reason for those who do not share those preferences – the minority segment of the population – to abide by them. Such segment of people is left without a choice; in most cases they may simply be compelled to submit, given the obvious reason that they fall within the matrix of the minority segment of the population. This further accounts for yet another problem of modern democracies, namely, the abounding low and relatively small public participation in decisions on the issues that concern them, and which are, therefore, unfortunately left to be decided by the “government” or politicians.

In sum, since the *de facto* liberal democracy and its directed-dictatorship sequel were bequeathed to Africa by colonial rulers, they lacked cultural roots upon which to stably stand thereby posing fundamental challenges and the subsequent failure of democracy in contemporary Africa. Such challenges invite critical analysis. In the section that

follows the study takes a critical and analytical look at the failures of democratic practice in contemporary Africa.

2.3 Failures of Democracy in Africa

In considering the failures of democracy in contemporary Africa, this study focuses mostly on the liberal form of democracy. This is because liberal democracy is the hallmark of the post-cold war global wave of democracy to consolidate hegemonic order (Osaghae, 1999:20). Nevertheless, as I have pointed out in the preceding section, liberal democracy faces a fundamental problem, which relates to the disjuncture between the state and society – between the political class and ordinary people. This disjuncture manifests itself in various forms – alienation, disempowerment and low sense of ownership of the state by the masses – pertinent to explaining the failures of democracy in contemporary Africa.

2.3.1 Incongruity with African political landscape

First, there is the problem of incongruity of European type of democracy with African values and political landscape. It is noted that European liberal democracy is not solidly established in Africa; and as such, it is threatened with strife and chaos arising from the social, cultural and political divides of the African society (Pardo and Schwartz, 2007:1). Liberal democracy is a product of the development of the capitalistic state whose central organising element is the autonomous individual who is the repository of human rights. This is at variance with the group structure of socio-economic and political organisation as well as rights in Africa.³⁶ Ake argues that the level and top-sided nature of development in most African states do not permit of private enterprise taking over and commanding heights of national economies in the name of democratisation (Ake, 1996; 2006:17). In the same vein, African leaders of the older

³⁶ Chole and Ibrahim (1995) delve much into the nature of the socio-economic variance of liberal democracy with African socio-economic and political organisations.

generation – the pre “third wave” – rejected democracy in its multi-party orientation because it polarizes multi-ethnic countries and reduces the capacity to keep the fragile nation-state intact. Former President of Kenya, Daniel arap Moi, is on record questioning the validity of multiparty democracy in Africa. He on many occasions retorted, *Demokrasia! Demokrasia ni kitu gani? Mwaafrika hajui demokrasia. Hiyo kitu itakuja kugawanya watu wetu katika makabila mbalimbali* (Democracy! What kind of thing is democracy? Africans do not know democracy. That thing [democracy] will come to divide our people along ethnic lines)³⁷.

Against the foregoing, it is argued that such kinds of questioning are, actually, calls for social and welfare democracy congruent with African social structures. In essence, democracy must claim some sense of cultural relevance. However, in attempts to claim such relevance, as Richard Sklar argues, all but a few of them were rudely swept away by military coups, political usurpations and constitutional changes shortly after independence (Sklar, 1983:12). This could be due to the fact the hopes and aspirations of the populace – political freedom and the realisation of true democracy – were not achieved. Those who emerged as liberators from the colonial yoke soon turned out to be conspirators serving the needs of foreign controllers.

Another major failure associated with liberal democracy’s incongruence with African values is its effects on the new generations. Africa’s new generations are condemned to grow up in an atmosphere of weaker civic values and virtues associated with Western societies; this definitely has a negative bearing on democracy and its future in Africa. The practice of democracy requires active involvement in and practice of values that define human beings in their social context – responsibility, respect and mutual concern – and not purely as individuals cut off from social networks. Unfortunately, in

³⁷ In many public *fora* prior to 4th December, 1991 when the repeal of Section 2A that made Kenya a *de jure* one party State was made, President Moi displayed such an attitude of indifference towards critical issues of human rights and democracy. He basically equated the calls for *democracy* with the political rhetoric for multi-party politics; and, thus, disunity and conflict along ethnic lines (see “Wako leads the Burial of Section 2A in *Society* on December 23, 1991:26; see also Winnie Mitullah, Moris Odhiambo and Osogo Ambani. *Kenya’s Democratisation: Gains or Losses? Appraising the Post KANU State of Affairs*, 2005:1).

contemporary Africa, such values appear to have been sacrificed on the altar of the Western way of life. Pardo and Schwartz allude to this fact when they write:

Values such as responsibility, work and effort, duty, solidarity, thriftiness, family, abiding by the law, respect for the elderly and for other people and their property, and even for their parents, and good manners are not totally accepted and even less practiced (Pardo and Schwartz, 2007:24).

In view of the foregoing, it can be argued that there is an apparent focus on the self and individual gain rather than on the communal good reminiscent of Western *cogito*, which imperils the whole practice of democracy in an African context. In consequence, there is more concern with consumption and hedonism than with work, which puts the performance of democracy in great jeopardy since leadership positions are, in most cases, seen as a means of expropriating state resources rather than service and responsibility towards fellow men and women – citizens.

If granted, then such mentality, concerns, values and attitudes associated with the current generation of leaders pose a real danger to democracy in contemporary Africa since arguably, as Gyekye points out, they constitute a type of political attitude that has opened the floodgates of bribery, corruption, carelessness about state property; and other un-ethical acts deleterious to the development and welfare of the state as such (Gyekye, 1997:136). This, as I argue, is in contradistinction to the African traditional communal life and spirit of mutual co-existence, which I suppose is hinged on the understanding that any injury done to the state – or community as a whole - directly affects the individual and *vice versa* as captured by John Mbiti in the expression, “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, 1978:16; 1970:141).

According to Samwel Makinda, the problem of liberal democracy in contemporary Africa can rightly be attributed to the inappropriateness of Western ideas and practices, the inexperience of leaders in running multi-party systems, and the general political, economic and social conditions of Africa (Makinda, 1996:567). This inappropriateness,

Makinda further observes, is occasioned by the mentality of “winner-takes-all”, which stems from the fact that those who control the machinery of government and administration have unlimited access to state resources (1996:567). It is noted that this is a pointer to the colonial state of affairs where the exercise of power was a matter of political and economic expediency, solely serving the interest of the metropole. This has led to an apparent lack of understanding the essence of multi-party democracy in contemporary Africa, which has yielded to the failure of disaggregating democracy from its specific Western practices.

In consequence, despite its apparent vigour, the practice of liberal democracy in Africa is debilitated by the effects of economic anarchy and social distemper with only a small minority of the population conspicuously wealthy and privileged while the vast majority seethes in discontent (Sklar, 1983:13). Those who adhere to the national conscience deplore the plunder and waste of Africa’s wealth by corruption of those at the helm of political power.

2.3.2 Opportunism and corporatist tendencies

There is yet another failure of democracy in contemporary Africa, which Eghosa Osaghae calls ‘divergent and contested operationalisation of democratization’ by a largely opportunistic political class in Africa (Osaghae, 1999:21). This failure is attested to by the high number of badly divided oppositions, mostly along ethnic lines. In many an instance, the so called “new leaders”³⁸ including leaders of pro-democracy groups, are either former ministers or displaced members of ruling parties. This means that – for the political elite – democracy is a naked power game, which affords the displaced politician another opportunity to secure new access to and misappropriation of national resources (Osaghae, 1999:21). The eventual result is the circulation of political elites defined by multiparty elections marred with violence and suspicion; power sharing deals not the rule of law; and lack of accountability on the part of the political leaders. This

³⁸ In most cases those who emerge as new leaders to replace authoritarian regimes were major players in previous governments, a fact that explains why most African countries have become “democratic” without being free (Osaghae, 1969:22). This is what Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, the father of multiparty politics in modern day Kenya referred to in his famous publication, *Not Yet Uhuru (1969)*. *Uhuru* is a Swahili word meaning freedom.

scenario serves as a benchmark for weak political opposition, whereby, once the opposition leaders have found reasonable accommodation within government, they let go of their serious push for true democracy.

This approach to democracy leads to corporatist tendencies, which in turn explains why, in most cases, leaders opt to sacrifice the common good on the altar of political expediency. In consequence, as Osaghae points out, the lower and middle-class citizens whose democratic currents normally fuel a more performance-*cum*-welfarist oriented and accountability demanding democracy, and who ordinarily demand for “democracy of empowerment” leading to ‘upliftment’ of the ordinary people, find themselves hijacked by the political elite. In most cases, their well-meaning notions of democracy become submerged by power politics of the political elite and the globalisation process, which takes the elite interest as the mainstay of democracy (Osaghae, 1999:22).

This exhibits, at interplay, colonial tendencies of dependency. The elites are seen as the bridgehead of integration into the world’s capitalistic system. There is a praetorian argument which discourages “mass democracy” on account of the ‘excessive’ social and welfare demands of the middle and lower class. Furthermore, there appear deeper sources of neo-colonial paradigms of the World Bank and IMF, which exclude from the process the very people for whom they are designed and supposed to benefit (Osaghae, 1999:22).

2.3.3 Modernisation-ripeness thesis

Modernisation-ripeness thesis is basically concerned with poverty, economic underdevelopment, low levels of industrialisation, urbanisation, national cohesion, underdevelopment of civic political culture, and the absence of other “social requisites” of democracy. Edward Keller argues that as regards this thesis, democracy may not work in some African countries – or is bound to fail all the same – due to low socio-

economic and political development, which he observes, are not conducive to democracy (Keller, 1995:228).

While it is true that Africa may be faced with acute poverty problems and low economic development more than in Europe or any other part of the world, these factors may only determine the success of liberal democracy and not necessarily that of democracy *per se*. On this argument, the modernisation-ripeness thesis does not hold. Further, in contradistinction to the thesis, as Osaghae argues, economic development and other social requisites do not in themselves guarantee democratic consolidation (Osaghae, 1999:17). This linkage, therefore, of democracy with economic development falls flat. Schmitter and Karl also point out that the linkage simply cannot hold. They write:

While the long-term compatibility between democracy and capitalism does not seem to be in doubt, despite their continuous tension, it is not clear whether the promotion of such liberal economic goals as the right of individuals to own property and retain profits, the closing function of markets, the private settlement of disputes, the freedom to produce without government regulation or the privatization of state-owned enterprises necessarily furthers the consolidation of democracy (Schmitter and Karl, 1996:60).

In this regard, there is another danger inherent in the modernisation-ripeness thesis, which relates to the fact that the so-called “social requisites” of democracy are confused to be necessary products of sound political democracy. To presume the inevitability of failure of democracy in Africa along these lines is tantamount to saying that Africa is not ripe and perhaps would not be ripe for democracy for ages to come. This, as has been pointed out, may only be true of liberal democracy, which is presumed to require a reasonable degree of capitalistic development but not democracy *sui generis*. The insistence on the social requisites of democracy has led to democracy’s dismal performance on the continent. In a multi-ethnic society like Africa, what is at stake is not necessarily the “social requisites” of democracy, but rather “political requisites”. There is the underdevelopment of “political requisites” defined by lack of values of tolerance and consultation; as well as political safeguards to protect the interest of

minorities and other marginalised and disadvantaged groups. This situation calls for effective multi-ethnic democracy and not “social requisites” *per se*, lest Africa plunges to the depths of sectional politics.

2.3.4 Sectional politics

In contemporary Africa, there is rampant ethnic mobilisation instead of issue-based politics. Unfortunately, most countries in Africa – Eritrea, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast, *et cetera* – have not found an expedient alternative to ethnic mobilisation in their attempt to sectional parties (Osaghae, 1999:16). This has led to bad political behaviour both by the ruling party and the opposition. In most cases some African leaders are not willing to abide by the “rules of the game” and there is the failure of the opposition to realise that they can play a meaningful role while *not* in power. The existence of multi-ethnic groups is used to serve the interest of politicians.

It is argued that while the existence of several ethnic groups does not *ipso facto* constitute a problem, some politicians have sought to capitalise on their fears and ignorance. In this case, liberal democracy has tended to exacerbate rather than reduce ethnic tensions just to further the career of some politicians (Makinda, 1996:570). This explains why, in most cases, opposition parties in Africa emerge strongly as an alternative political force and possible replacement to authoritarianism only to split up when nearing elections – perpetuating the rule of the incumbent. In Kenya, for instance, the Forum for Restoration of Democracy – FORD - had become the main opposition under Jaramogi Oginga Odinga in 1990. In 1992, just about election time, FORD split with Kenneth Matiba leading a predominantly Kikuyu faction of FORD-Asili and Jaramogi leading FORD-Kenya, a faction predominantly Luo. This phenomenon repeated itself in 1997 when FORD Kenya split after a long leadership tussle between Kijana Wamalwa and Raila Odinga following the death of Jaramogi in 1994. Michael Kijana Wamalwa retained FORD-Kenya with a predominantly Luhya support; while Raila Odinga, the son of Jaramogi, walked away and formed the National Development

Party-NDP enjoying the Luo ethnic-based support. Such scenarios are common across the continent.

In view of the foregoing, it can be concluded that the failure of liberal democracy in contemporary Africa relates in significant ways to ethnic-cum-sectional politics. Such politics thrives dangerously on the critical lack of effective grassroots mobilisation and organisation necessary for articulating the wishes of ordinary people as regards the type of government they desire.

2.3.5 Authoritarianism

Another failure of democracy in Africa is attributed to the phenomenon of authoritarian terrain of politics. Authoritarianism manifests itself in the persistent undemocratic values and behaviours of African leaders relating to the “hybrid regimes” – political regimes in which the transition entailed blending of democratic institutions with important legacies from a recent authoritarian past. Aristide Zolberg traces the origin of such authoritarian behaviour and concludes that contemporary African societies are syncretic arrangements of two sets of values, norms and structures, the *new* and the residual with the latter itself usually subdivided into distinct subsets (Zolberg, 1968:71). African leaders opted for foreign values and continued with colonial legacies while adopting state structures such as repressive legislations, use of armed forces and police – including security agencies – and institutional practices which assert the primacy of presidents over parliament and judiciary, and preserve the subordination of civil society to state authority (Osaghae, 1999:18)

These undemocratic values and behaviour of the leaders persist in contemporary Africa as a perpetuation of authoritarian politics since, as Osaghae again observes, there are instances where African governments are forced to “grudgingly” agree to adopt democratic values; and even those who do so voluntarily, only do so to satisfy donor

conditionality and legitimize their hold on power (Osaghae, 1999:18). This has definitely led to the failure of the establishment of true democracy, which is responsive to the needs of the populace.

Arguably, true democracy can hardly be built under such conditional circumstances. In fact true democracy cannot be built in situations where the political leaders, governments and their international benefactors who give priority to power-politics, economic growth and stability over democracy, also claim the prerogative of deciding the form of democracy for the ordinary people. Thus, insofar as democracy is characterised by African states succumbing to pressure of Western reforms, will liberal democracy in Africa remain a sham democracy.

In view of the foregoing it can be argued that the demand by the World Bank and IMF on smaller bureaucracies for reduced government expenditure, removal of food subsidies, though they have a possibility of more wealth in the long run, is a misplaced demand and a minimalist approach to the establishment of true democracy for that matter, which only causes pain for the African populace (Makinda, 1996:568). In view of this, an argument can, therefore, be advanced that the majority of people in Africa are more interested in finding how a system of government can help them to cope with daily hardships of life rather than ensuring that the government is accountable to a donor community or institution.

Nonetheless, while this study acknowledges that economic stability is a necessary condition for liberal democracy to thrive, it is of very little concern for the ordinary citizens. What the ordinary citizens require most is that leaders should remove existing class and regional disparities by extending social and economic benefits to previously disadvantaged groups. This is a sure way of reinforcing democratic legitimacy and authority in modern Africa.

2.3.6 Weakness of representatives

Another reason that accounts for the failure of democracy in Africa today is the weakness of representatives' oversight and judicial institutions. It is argued that these institutions are not strong enough to pressurise the government to serve the common good. John Holm and Patrick Molutsi, while citing the case of Botswana, argue that the efficacy of civil society to hold government to account has continued to be limited by developmental and *apolitical* orientation of most of its constituents which restrict its influence to advisory activities (Holm and Molutsi, 1996:44).

This problem is further compounded by the reluctance of governments to permit free-willing and politically efficacious civil society. Many urban-based middle class citizens and labour unions are more concerned with engaging the state to exact privileges and material benefits for their members rather than more durable equity in dealing with competing interests (Holm and Molutsi, 1996:56). As a result, there is the tendency of a more powerful civil society getting eaten up by the political elite. With the swallowing up of perceived strong representatives, the practice of democracy goes un-checked, and there emerges a myriad of challenges ranging from abuse of power to barefaced disregard of people's rights – discrimination – informed by the attitude of winner-takes-all (Holm and Molutsi, 1996:56).

2.3.7 Globalisation

Democracy in Africa also faces the problem of globalisation. The stress on globalism of democratisation puts Africa in a perpetual dependent position. This means that Africa is not only on the receiving end as far as democratic political paradigm is concerned, but also that democratisation provides – within the continent – an opportunity to establish new linkages of control. This is because, in Osaghae's own words, "globalisation of democracy is an American-led Western project to consolidate

hegemonic order of post-cold war era” (Osaghae, 1999:20). In this regard, the failure of democracy can be attributed to globalisation shifting its focus from Africa and Africans to the “benevolent” international community that determines whether or not the process of democratisation is successful (Osaghae, 1999:20).

The resultant problem is a resounding one. In most cases the international community sees “democratic success” where ordinary citizens can hardly see any meaningful changes – difference – in their lives. What this means is that the practice of liberal democracy in Africa today is more concerned with satisfying donor conditionality than meeting the needs of the ordinary people. This problem is further compounded by the fact that pro-democracy movements and opposition parties mostly receive funds from international donors, and are interested in bringing their countries to “international standard” without much meaningful democratic development in the state.

It can then be advanced that concern with global conditions has weakened the basis of accountability to citizens thereby deepening the disjuncture between the state and the ordinary citizens. Of this reality Osaghae conclusively writes:

As it were, accountability to the World Bank/IMF and other international community masters meant less responsibility toward internal constituents as government abandoned obligations to citizens in the production of social goods, and the global gatekeepers of democracy saw nothing wrong in the supposedly democratic regimes enforcing unpopular and life-threatening economic reforms on which the people were not consulted and which they voted against in several anti-government riots and demonstrations (Osaghae, 1999:21).

It is evident, therefore, that Africa is not only being controlled but is also influenced by foreign institutions; and external influence has indeed become power itself. This signifies a major problem of Africa’s inability to control its own affairs. Kofi Buenor Hador points out that:

No other part of the world is more dependent on external forces than Africa. The decisions that influence her are not made in Accra, Nairobi or Addis Ababa. They are made in London, Paris, Washington or Moscow (Hadjor, 1987:5).

With this mode of operation, African governments are more reliant on the backing they receive from abroad than focusing on the needs of the people. and the support they can get from them. Consequently, operative democratic institutions that were designed to regulate Africa's subjection in the colonial era continue to ensure its subservience in the global political order (Hadjor, 1987:6).

It should be noted that it is not the global perception that makes democracy a political system but rather the "interaction" between the leading and the led. Those at the helm of political power must personify the need and dreams of the masses, their yearning for freedom, dignity and better life. This is what may lead to genuine political authority in modern day Africa. Nevertheless, it is the lack of genuine political authority – legitimacy – that continues to highlight the estrangement of African political elite from their societies.

2.3.8 Neo-patrimonial rule

Lastly, we address the failure of democracy in contemporary Africa as a consequence of neo-patrimonial politics. It is held that neo-patrimonialism is the institutional hallmark of postcolonial African politics (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997:61). This concept derives from Max Weber's notion of patrimonial authority, which relates to "the exercise of power in small-scale, face-to-face types of traditional communities" (Hyden, 2000:18). In the context of the modern state, however, neo-patrimonialism refers to a situation where rulers have access to enormous resources that a state can mobilise; and ensures political stability by selectively allocating favours and material benefits that are not regularised in state budget to loyal followers (Hyden, 2000:19). In fact, in a patrimonial political system, an individual rules by dint of personal prestige

and power; and ordinary people are treated as extensions of the “big man’s” household, with no rights and privileges other than those bestowed on them by the ruler (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997:61). As a result, the fundamental characteristic of neo-patrimonial rule is that it is the very opposite of democracy as it is characterised by the absence of transparency and public accountability. Its very nature is that it is kept private and secret.

In contemporary Africa, neo-patrimonialism manifests itself in ‘imperial presidency’ where a presidential system is used to enhance the power of the head of state – presidentialism. Presidentialism implies that there is a concentration of political power in the hands of one individual who resists all but the most trivial decision-making tasks (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997:63). In such a circumstance, the formal rules of the system are flouted as authority is personalised. Consequently, what exists is the dyadic relation between the “strong man” and his political acolytes, who, as Bratton and Van de Walle observe, comprise pyramids and factional networks. They further observe that this is what made rulers like Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia, Sekou Toure´ in Guinea and Felix Houphouet-Boigny in Cote d’Ivoire leave a deep personal imprint on national politics – moulding their countries political rules and rhetoric, thus making for their ‘over-stay’ in power (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997:63-4). This makes the practice of democracy unpredictable.

Hyden argues that the most damaging aspect of the tendency to “privatise” politics and treat it as a “closed shop” in this manner renders it virtually impossible to punish someone who has been an insider but who, for some reason, proves to be a political liability. He further points out that in most cases such persons are rewarded with lucrative and prestigious appointments such as an ambassadorial placement in order not to “divulge” information that is deemed harmful to the ruling clique (Hyden, 2000:21). The consequence of such a practice is clear: there is a perpetuation of corruption due to the fact that lack of accountability is appreciated rather than condemned. This is what leads to the economic decline of the state, which characterises most polities in contemporary Africa.

Other than non-accountability to the public, another feature of neo-patrimonialism is patriarchy. In such a system, women have no guaranteed avenue for advancement in political leadership; and the few who manage to, do so at the discretion of men, particularly the “strong man”. Arguably, democracy fails in this connection to make full use of women’s human resources (Hyden, 2000:22). If Africa is to move forward and if democracy is to bear any mark of relevance in people’s lives in contemporary times, then the role of women cannot be ignored.

Another salient feature that has led to the failure of democracy in modern Africa as far as neo-patrimonialism is concerned is the fact that in most cases political appointments are not based on merit. There is a deliberate effort to make appointments not on the basis of one’s learned skills – technical know-how – but rather on the basis of relations – technical know-who. More often than not meritocracy is sacrificed on the altar of ethnicity. As a result, the leader is expected to favour certain groups of people and preferably his own who, because of the apparent relation they share with him – the “strong man” – hold onto the attitude that “it is their time to eat”.

This phenomenon leads to two glaring negative consequences in democratic practice in modern Africa; the first is the wasting of human resources who can use their talent and professional prowess to help build the state. This is because it is most unlikely that the qualified persons will ever get the job. In most cases it can be advanced that jobs are given not on the basis of academic qualification – technical competence – but rather on the basis of birth qualification – how one is related to the “strong man”. Secondly, it tends to generate conflicts between primary social organisations where the principle basis for membership is ethnicity, clan, or race³⁹. With this in mind, it is advanced that neo-patrimonialism presents a crude way of practicing politics – the zero-sum approach

³⁹ Instances in which identity is deliberately politicised to serve the interest of those in power abound in Africa. Some notable examples include Siyad Barre’s nefarious manipulation of clan relations in Somalia; Daniel Moi’s use of ethnic violence to strengthen the fortunes of his party – KANU – elections in Kenya; and Nigeria’s 1993 refusal of election results as having placed a man from a “wrong” ethnic group in power (Hyden, 2000:23).

– in which there is no scope for compromise. In consequence, it remains detrimental to reasoned deliberation and policy-making necessary for the practice of true democracy as such (Hyden, 2000:23).

2.4 A final critique of liberal democracy

The spread of liberal democracy marked a major political development of the 20th century. Nevertheless, as I have pointed out, the emergence of liberal democracy relates to a particular culture – European culture. Ake specifically points out that liberal democracy is ‘a product of a socially atomised society where production and exchange are already commoditised; a society which is essentially a market. It is a product of a society in which interests are so particularized that the very notion of common interest becomes problematic hence the imperative of democracy’ (Ake, 1993:243-244). This phenomenon makes absurd liberal democracy’s claim to universality. To overlook the cultural specificity of a people in transferring democracy simply jeopardises its legitimacy and effectiveness. This is what has made democracy to perform so dismally in Africa in the 21st century. Adetulla vividly captures this reality. He argues:

The purveyors of liberal democracy ignore the differences in the process of historical development and change in different regions of the world. Also, the preference for a state-centric legal-bureaucratic basis of authority that is tailored after the experience of Western societies does not hold actual or potential benefits for non-western countries (Adetulla, 2011:17).

Liberal democracy, though it fundamentally relates to the theory of liberalism, can be argued to have yielded to a great variety of ‘liberal democracies’ based on how best to preserve civil liberties or structure representative democracy. For example, regarding representation, some theorists would favour parliamentary or presidential, some others will favour proportional representation or others still will opt for a free hand for elected officials (Cunningham, 2002:29). As such, the adoption of liberal democracy as the

dominant ideology of political order is solely to allow liberalism to determine the nature of the state. In view of this, B. Parekh holds that liberal democracy focuses mainly on who exercises state power and how he/she acquires authority. Consequently, he concludes that the concern of liberal democracy is whether a regime is “authoritarian” or “representative” (Parekh, 1993:165).

In line with the foregoing, I argue that the practice of liberal democracy in modern Africa lacks authentic participation of the populace since it focuses mainly on the typology of government in place – and not on the people themselves. In this sense democracy in Africa only passes as “a form of political regime in which citizens choose, in competitive elections, the occupants of the political offices of the state” (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997:13). Accordingly, Africa’s transition to democracy can only be gauged in the context of competitive election “as long as that election is freely and fairly conducted within a matrix of civil liberties, and that all contestants accept the validity of the election results” (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997:13).

This presents three challenges to consolidation of democracy in Africa; firstly, the contestants may not be “true” democrats in the sense that they may not necessarily be interested in the wellbeing of the people as such. Secondly, the approach does not presuppose the existence of a political culture of democracy among either the citizens or the political contestants themselves. Lastly, the quality of elections generally remains suspect, and cannot be taken as a sufficient condition for democratisation; in most African states it is a source of conflict as experiences in Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Togo and Zimbabwe have shown (Adetulla, 2011:18).

To limit democracy to elections – electoral democracy – is to refuse to wake up to the reality that democracy *sui generis* must affirm and not deny the legitimate moral claim of the people themselves. It is to refuse to take note of the important fact that in Africa “democracy is a way of constituting political relations such that the exercise of state power receives popular authorization” (Mehta, 2003:35). In consequence, the most

challenging and complex task in establishing true democracy is embedded in the realisation that the romance of democracy, the aspirations it generates and the passions it inspires, cannot be limited to electing governments (Mehta, 2003:35-6).

Liberal democracy with its main focus on elections, has failed to produce a viable and meaningful democracy in contemporary Africa. Instead, it has led to fraudulent leadership and erosion of democratic effectiveness and legitimacy by sheer rhetoric, and a total disregard of the principles of popular sovereignty. The fact remains that the fundamental postulates of political legitimacy are being constrained by underdeveloped and fragile public institutions, and by neo-patrimonial leaders determined to disregard popular demands. In sum, against the analysis of the failures of democracy, it can be logically inferred that liberal democracy only passes in Africa as an electoral type of democracy with a lack of requisite political legitimacy and corresponding effectiveness.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter was designed to outline the failures of democracy in contemporary Africa. In the course of analysis, it was underscored that Africa is a culturally diverse society. The way democracy confronts this diversity will lead not only to the establishment of a viable and meaningful democracy, but also to a more profound and comprehensive understanding of what such basic notions as political equality, autonomy and justice mean in such a culturally diverse setting. As a result, it is necessary to see how democracy applies to the cultural groups – community – and not only to individuals. In essence, for democracy to find a lasting root in Africa, it requires, as a matter of urgency, a multicultural approach. Failure to take cultural diversity into consideration – and assuming a culturally homogeneous body of politic – may lead not only to inadequate ways of solving the problems of democracy in Africa, but also to an unfortunate total absence of democracy in the long run.

Efforts by external governments, institutions and agencies to direct socio-economic and political changes in Africa, must not deny the people of Africa the right to determine their own future, otherwise democratic legitimacy, once again, will be greatly and profoundly affected.

Since there is not a tradition of Western-type democracy in Africa, it will take time to establish institutions in which it thrives; Western democracy remains a system that does not correspond to the African political landscape. Nevertheless, there should be a contextualised form of democracy most suitable for the African situation. This explains why Ake likens democracy to development when he notes that it is “not something that one people does for another. People must do it for themselves or it does not happen” (Ake, 1996:69).

The validity of Ake’s assertion cannot be denied. Democracy requires to be contextualised in order to be viable. Such a democracy must recognise that African traditional polity was defined by democratic principles of popular participation, consent and accountability. That is, rather than see African cultural and social formations as obstacles to democracy, as the colonialists and some “white” scholars do, they should justify the search for appropriate democratic forms that would enable those values to find expression in modern Africa. It is on this understanding that the study looks at African culture and democracy in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

AFRICAN CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY

Like development, democratization is not something that one people does for another. People must do it for themselves or it does not happen.

[Claude Ake, *Rethinking Democracy*, 1996]

3.1 Introduction

The existence of true democracy in post-independence Africa is a debatable phenomenon. This is partly because in the post-independence era, the state in Africa has held too tightly to its colonial antecedent to the detriment of the establishment and development of a viable and meaningful democracy with which Africans can identify. As a result, the practice of democracy has been impaired in many ways; and, arguably so, the political institutions that were bequeathed to the African people by the colonial rulers have failed to function properly in post-colonial Africa. This failure manifests itself in many ways – as we have seen in the previous chapter – including the unavoidable consequences of political confusion, uncertainty, and frustration that still abound in contemporary Africa. There is obvious political instability and the abysmally poor governmental performance in most African states is indicative of a lack of consonance and congruence between Western democracy and the African way of life as well as traditional political practice.

In order to establish viable political structures for contemporary Africa, there is a need for recourse to African values in the traditional system of government. This is a plausible endeavour toward making democracy in Africa both meaningful and viable because

“traditional system of government did have some democratic features that a new political system can profit by” (Gyekye, 1997:116). In other words, there is an urgent need for traditional African cultural values to be brought to bear on the practice of democracy in order to yield better governance for Africa in contemporary times.

In this chapter, I seek to appraise the fact that the social order of any African community is communal (Gyekye, 1995:154), and argue that communalism as such is a doctrine of human nature, which is indispensable for any socio-political organisation. As such, for democracy to be truly established in post-independence Africa, it ought to embody certain philosophical perspectives about African social organisation – communitarianism (Gyekye, 1995:154).

In view of the foregoing, based on the Akan social thought as presented by Gyekye, this chapter seeks to unravel those democratic features of African indigenous government as embedded in communalism; and that are in line with the *ethos* of democracy, which can be brought to bear meaningfully on modern democratic practice in Africa. It further provides an analytical account of political institutions and how they operated in the African traditional set up. Philosophical underpinnings of these institutions attempted to address the concern of whether or not the indigenous political system exhibited democratic features.

3.2 The concept of culture and African social existence

The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* provides a basic definition of culture as “customs, beliefs, art, music, and all other products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time”. This definition, in my reading, suggests two fundamental features about culture: first, is the fact that culture is human. The second, following logically from the first, relates to the fact that culture expresses uniqueness and creativity, and as such it distinguishes human beings from other beings.

Henry Odera Oruka attempts a definition of culture and underscores that:

Culture is man's contribution to the nature of environment. It is a general way of life of a people, which among other things demonstrates their celebrated achievements in thought, morals and material production (Oruka, 2002:58).

This view is shared by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. Though Wa Thiong'o sees culture in a similar manner, he conceives it in a broader sense and defines it as "a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment" (Wa Thiong'o, 1972:4).

Both views allude to the fact that the concept of culture is a prerequisite for understanding a people's history and how they have maintained themselves in existence. Following these conceptions, Odera Oruka observes that the content of culture can be summarised in a threefold manner, which incorporates a people's body of knowledge, beliefs and values, behaviours, goals, social institutions, tools, techniques as well as material constructions (Oruka, 2002:58).

The contents of culture that Oruka outlines above can be rephrased and further expounded for purposes of clarity. In this context, my reading of Oruka reveals that what he refers to as 'a people's body of knowledge' can be rightly and properly termed as the 'cultural knowledge' of a people. In this sense, culture is what informs actions that people undertake in a given social and cultural context. It is the "reason"⁴⁰ people hold for performing or not performing particular action(s). Arguably, against the understanding of 'cultural knowledge', culture exists as tacit knowledge. That is, knowledge commonly acknowledged, understood, and practiced without necessarily being committed to writing or explicit expression. It constitutes a thought system – a set

⁴⁰ The reason people hold for the things they do may not be as systematic and logically convincing for an outsider. But it is what convincingly holds members of a given society together to act in a particular manner.

of norms, standards, notions and beliefs – which forms the basis of an automotive mode of operation, reflected through belief system, customs, practices, art and music affecting a people's pattern of behaviour and attitude.

In view of the above consideration, it is plausible to advance the argument that if people know what democracy entails with regard to their social and cultural orientation then they will identify with it and be committed to it at least in some way. This is because the beliefs, values, behaviour, goals and social institutions are what, in my opinion, properly constitute and determine a people's "cultural behaviour". If this position is admissible, then I am persuaded to advance that it is both the "cultural knowledge" and "cultural behaviour" that connote the way a group of people actually undertake actions within its societal confines. In essence, both features outline how and why people behave and relate to the social and political institutions of their society. In consequence thereof, it is both cultural knowledge and behaviour that explains how and why a particular group of people will participate in a democracy.

Lastly, Oruka makes references to tools, techniques and material constructions, which I take to together constitute a phenomenon called "cultural artifacts". Cultural artifacts are the things people make and use in the expression of their culture. Understood in this manner, a people's cultural knowledge, behaviour and artifacts constitute an adequate, holistic cultural expression, which must come to terms with all aspects of their social existence and praxis (Gbadegesin, 1991:174). This is to say that culture emerges from the socio-economic and political conditions of a society. It is on this ground that I am persuaded to think and argue that culture serves as a basis of democratic practice.

Wiredu, in the article titled "*The Moral Foundations of African Culture*", shifts the debate from the meaning of culture to what literally informs it – morality. Wiredu does this in a bid to establish the practicality of culture. He argues that morality is universal and essential to all human culture. As a result, any human society without a modicum of morality is bound to collapse. In this context, he sees morality simply as the

observance of rules necessary for the harmonious adjustment of interests of the individual to those of others in the society (Wiredu, 2002:287). It can be argued that it is in this very sense that Wiredu's conception of culture echoes the concept of "cultural behaviour" of Odera Oruka.

Conceived thus, culture has the potential to meaningfully bear politically on democratic practice in contemporary Africa. To my mind, what logically follows from Wiredu's perspective is that the harmonious adjustment of interests of the individual to those of others connotes reciprocity required in democratic governance. That is, it creates a situation where leaders use their leadership positions in ensuring the welfare of the state, and the citizens attune their socio-cultural, economic and political behaviour in line with the laid out rules to make this possible. In consequence, culture can enhance democracy's legitimacy and effectiveness for it is the people's holistic way of life. It is against this backdrop that I argue further that if democracy lacks legitimacy and effectiveness in contemporary Africa – as it actually does to a larger extent – it is because it has not allowed African cultural values to inform its practice. That is, democratic practice in Africa has not embraced African morality, which is quintessentially a social need for the viability of democracy as such.

In line with the above reasoning, it can plausibly be advanced that morality is a *conditio sine qua non* for culture. This is essentially so because morality affects the socio-political life of a people since it relates to the sense of duty that individuals ought to have toward each other and the state within a communal context. Thus, as Wiredu argues:

Morality in this sense does not just involve the *de facto* conformity to the requirements of the harmony of interests, but also conformity to those requirements which is inspired by an imaginative and sympathetic identification with the interest of others even at the cost of a possible abridgement of one's own interest (Wiredu, 2002:287).

My reading of Wiredu is that the moral basis of political culture should be derived from a metaphysical foundation of a people's way of life. The requirements of morality as a basis for a people's way of life which are central to making democratic practice in modern Africa meaningful and viable for morality does not just involve the *de facto* conformity to the requirements and harmony of individual interests but it yields to capture and conforms to the harmony of communal interest as well.

In sum, it is culture that helps individuals to develop their capacities for mutual respect and compromise; and deepen their understanding of the common good (Valadez, 2001:5). This, to my mind, explains why democratic practice in contemporary Africa should be pegged on the moral foundation of African culture of communalism, without which, as I argue and present in the section that follows, it would remain an odyssey – a long tiresome journey whose end in view may still lie in an epistemological oblivion.

It is in view of the foregoing that Oruka further sees as a formidable aspect of culture, the great thoughtful minds it has produced as well as those aspects of human life that such minds have helped to shed light onto. He notes that in any given culture, celebrated achievements in thought consist of ideas of its sages, scientists, artists, poets, prophets, philosophers, statesmen, and moralists, *et cetera* (Oruka, 2002:59). This constitutes what he technically calls the intellectual⁴¹ lights of culture. This means, therefore, that it is impossible to think of culture without at the same time thinking about the people – men and women – who have made a contribution in shaping it. In this case it would be absurd to think of African political culture without thinking of contributions of such political figures as Nkrumah, Nyerere, Senghor, *et cetera* who are regarded to have given African political culture its direction through their various conceptions of African way of life.

⁴¹ It is intellectual because no serious attack or defense of a culture is possible if it does not account for those ideas of thoughtful minds without whose ideas no culture would be possible (Oruka, 2002: 59).

In view of the foregoing, it can be pointed out that cultural achievement in thought is central to shaping the direction of democratic practice. Even so, other than achievement in thought, culture helps in the creation of moral institutions and systems. That is, in its moral perspective, culture should be understood in a wider context to incorporate the socio-political and religious conventions. In this sense, “the values of culture ceremoniously bind people together through institutionalised form of life” (Oruka, 2002:59). As a result communitarianism – as a way of life – expresses an African traditional cultural consciousness, which places emphasis on the activity and success of the wider society (Gyekye, 1995:155) necessary for politically viable and meaningful democratic structures in modern Africa. With this in mind the study takes a critical look into the concept of communitarianism in order to establish the cultural bases of African traditional political practice.

3.3 Communitarianism and traditional African political practice

Wiredu observes that the first wave of rulers of post-independence African states was basically faced by the fundamental question of “What form of government, or more generally, social organisation was best suited to the requirements of (a) the social and economic development that had become stunted under colonialism; and (b) the restoration of the cultural identity that colonialism had eroded” (Wiredu, 1996:145). It is this fundamental question that led leaders like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, to develop both political and developmental blueprints based on the “conceptions of community, polity and the general good” (Wiredu, 1996:145). It is within these historical circumstances that I am persuaded to think that African Socialism emerged as a basis for political action. It is, therefore, against this backdrop that this study focuses on communalism as a primordial mode of existence that did inform political practice in traditional Africa; and from which political values can be drawn for meaningful democratic practice in contemporary Africa.

Gyekye argues that the social order of any African community is communal. He sees the correct description of the African social order as depicting both features of communality and individuality – amphibious (Gyekye, 1995:154). Accordingly, he says that it is a doctrine of social organisation emanating from the Akan concept of humanism, which is embedded in the fact of “ensuring the welfare and interest of each member of the society” (Gyekye, 1995:155). In essence, according to him, such welfare and interest of every member of the society cannot be attained outside a communal system primarily because communalism focuses primarily on the activity and success of the wider society without, of course, looking down upon the activity and success of the individual. Arguably, it is on this basis that communitarianism as a doctrine of human nature and relationship can be said to embody certain political elements and democratic practice in traditional Africa. Gyekye captures this reality when he writes that, “it is perhaps indisputable that social institutions embody philosophical perspective about human nature and social relationships” (1995:154).

My reading of Gyekye is that the very nature of communalism, which explicates its political demeanor in traditional African society, is hinged on the fact of each member acknowledging the existence of common values, obligations and understanding; and embodying feelings of loyalty, commitment, willingness and desire to advance its interests. That is, individual members of the society ought to fully participate in the life of the community by demonstrating concern for the well-being of others and doing what in effect advances the common good (Gyekye, 1996:36). It is on this basis that Gyekye conceives society as natural to man and as a necessary condition for human existence. He quotes the Akan proverb that captures this reality thus: “When a man descends from heaven, he descends into a human society” (*onipa firi sorobesi a, obesi onipa kurom*) (Gyekye, 1995:155). He sees human sociality as preordained by the Supreme Being. That is, human beings are originally born into a human society (*onipa kurom*) with an already predefined social nature rendering solitariness a kind of impossible existence since individual capacities, as he notes, are not sufficient to meet the basic human requirements. As such he aptly argues that “the individual inevitably requires the succor and the relationships of others in order to realize or satisfy the basic needs” (Gyekye, 1995:155).

Accordingly, Masolo asserts that “Communitarianism represents the view that the attainment of human needs is best served in union with others” (Masolo, 2010:145). In other words, communitarianism presupposes the critical fact that it does not of necessity negate individualism; but rather, its essence lies in the recognition of the limited character of the possibilities of the individual, which whittle away self sufficiency of the individual as such. Thus, in spite of an individual’s giftedness and abilities, there is an embedded insufficiency to achieve one’s welfare through a solitary effort.

It is in view of the foregoing that Gyekye further points out that, in the Akan social thought, communitarianism is indicative of the value of collective action, mutuality, and interdependence as necessary conditions for the realisation of both individual welfare as well as the successful achievement of most difficult undertakings. The individual should, therefore, work for the good of all, which includes his or her own good. He says this is the essential nature of communalism - the insistence that the good of all determines the good of each – in the Akan social thought as captured in the following set of proverbs:

One finger cannot lift up a thing.
If one man scrapes the bark of a tree for medicine, the pieces
fall down.
The left arm washes the right arm and the right arm washes the
left arm. (Gyekye, 1995:156).

As such, it is important to point out that communalism entails the fact that life can only be more successful and meaningful when it is lived in the context of identifying with and depending on the group. In consequence, communitarianism is depictive of an ideal social order, which calls for full participation of all members of the society. Arguably, therefore, such participation is characterised by social and ethical values necessary for democratic governance such as social well-being, solidarity, interdependence,

cooperation, and reciprocal obligation, all of which are conducive to the equitable distribution of resources and benefit of the society (Gyekye, 1995:157).

It is on the basis of the foregoing that Masolo links theoretical underpinnings of African communitarianism to emancipatory politics of independence from European colonialism. He says it is an ethic of everyday life and social order, which is a mode of interdependent life, a moral good and not a mere passive and mechanistic cosmic arrangement, which in essence entails better ways of human living than any other mode (Masolo, 2010:246). He underlines that the expression of such a mode of existence is found in many local idioms of African communities. He captures one such idiom that is used to enthruse someone to help a needy neighbour from the Luo community of Kenya, thus:

It is humans who sacrifice for each other (literally “it is among humans that one may decide to go hungry for a night so another person can eat”) –*dhano ema nindo-niga wadgi kech* (Masolo, 2010:246).

Nevertheless, Masolo is quick to point out that there could be other idioms which appear to contradict the communitarian principle, such as “*dhier ma kowaduu ok moni nindo*” (a person’s eye does not miss sleep because his or her neighbour is poor) (Masolo, 2010:246), which does not literally imply that one feels the pangs of hunger; but, rather that the awareness that someone actually is in such a distress can only be rescued by one who is better placed. In fact, as he rightly argues, such awareness constitutes a critical entry point to the consideration of the fact that “a world where everyone is left out to their own fate, cannot be a world of happy people, at least not everyone all the time” (Masolo, 2010:246). As such, an ideal social order can only be realised with the recognition that human beings depend on each other for their own benefit and for the benefit of the society at large.

To my mind, in line with the foregoing discussion, it can be advanced that, in the African context, communitarianism entails special responsibility and indiscriminate concern for each other. This is critical to political and democratic practice in post-independence Africa in the sense that it creates awareness of fair play in social interaction among members of the society. Arguably, therefore, in a well-controlled ambience of communality, the public good is not only secure but also tends to diffuse quintessentially to each and every cog of the social system in a more or less proportionate measure (Nyasani, 2010: 246).

In sum, communitarianism directs and commands the actions of individuals in the society restraining them from interfering with the destiny of each other as preordained by the Divine Order, and, as such, respecting the beacons of each individual's existence (Nyasani, 2010:246). It is on the foregoing account that the following section delves into unraveling the democratic character of traditional African system – mode of life and political institutions.

3. 4 Democratic character of traditional African system

It has been argued that traditional African society was characterised by a democratic way of life epitomised by such features as the will of the people, freedom of expression of opinion, and the limited power of the highest political leader, the chief (Gyekye, 1997:116). However, the most fundamental feature of the traditional African democratic practice was that government was by the will of the people whose opinion was sought on every matter. People's opinion was sought on all socio-economic and political activities. Arguably, every matter that involved decision-making was put to the poll and came out stamped with the seal of authority of the people's will. And so, political rule was by the people's consent.⁴²

⁴² Even though the Chief presided over the exercise of political authority within the society, such authority derived from the people themselves. Both the ruler, Chief and the governed, the people were held together by a reciprocal and contractual bond; and the Chief possessed only delegated authority (Gyekye, 1997:117).

All in all, while some scholars may advance that political practice in traditional African society was by no means democratic⁴³, I maintain that traditional African political practice had democratic elements in both theory and practice, which elements could be brought to bear on contemporary political practice (Gyekye, 1997:120). I choose to discuss such practices under the institution of chieftaincy as well as the communal mode of African life for they seem to cut across many traditional African societies; and extant literature has delved so much into them.

3.4.1 Chieftaincy

In traditional African society, chieftaincy was an outstanding political institution. Its democratic character and value lay in features such as the status of the chief, the nature of authority, and the relationship between the chief and the people. Gyekye points out that chieftainship as a political institution is widely practiced in traditional African communities (Gyekye, 1997:121). According to Nelson Mandela, chieftaincy wielded such power and influence that it was the very centre around which life revolved (Mandela, 1994:19). For the purpose of this study, I limit myself to Gyekye's Akan example of chieftaincy in order to analyse the aspects already outlined above. In so doing, I submit that it should not be misconstrued to mean that the pattern of governance was exactly the same in every community's chieftaincy one came across. Rather, it is the view that there were significant similarities among them across African communities to warrant it being termed an African phenomenon. I submit too, that, while it may be a rare phenomenon to be ruled by chiefs in contemporary society, the manner of political operation of the chief in the traditional set-up can still be used as an archetype to inform political leadership in present day Africa.

⁴³ I have in mind those cultural universalists who hold the view that democracy – while having its roots in Western civilization, forms the central aspect of a universal, normative framework that eschews time, space and context – is a trans-cultural phenomenon; and as such allude to the fact that African culture is intrinsically hostile to democracy (Donnelly, 1989; Howard, 1986; Lipuma & Koelble, 2009; Chabal & Daloz, 1999).

Among the Akan people, for instance, every town or village is made up of several clans. Each town or village constitutes a political unit. A chief governs the political unit; he is normally chosen from a royal lineage. That is to say, a chief is chosen from within one of the clans regarded to have founded the village. It is important to note that the royalty status of the family is not only to be recognised, but also accepted, by the people themselves. He outlines that each clan consists of many lineages and each lineage comprises of many individuals linked by blood relationships. A great number of towns and villages form a paramountcy state (*oman*), headed by a paramount chief (Gyekye, 1997:121).

There is a chief and a council of elders for each village or town. While each elder heads a clan within the village, it is the chief who presides at the council meetings. Nevertheless, each lineage or town – in the conduct of their affairs – acts autonomously without any interference from either the chief or the paramount chief. This is indicative of decentralised power and political system, about which the modern “democratic” state in Africa is still so incredulous; and yet, which Gyekye affirms, is an outstanding feature of the traditional Akan political culture (1997:121).

It is important to note that while the chief was elected or chosen from the royal lineage, he was chosen by the head of the lineage “in consultation with the members of that lineage” (Gyekye, 1997:121). It is the element of consultation that guaranteed his acceptance as well as legitimacy of his authority to rule. The paramount chief was chosen in the same manner. The critical idea here is that neither the chief nor the paramount chief was imposed on the people he was meant to govern or lead. This is in contradistinction to the practice of modern democracies where a leader – election winner – is declared irrespective of election irregularities or disputes rendering such a leader to be regarded as an imposed one by those who see themselves as clearly short changed.

Gyekye informs us that it is only when the chief has been accepted that rituals and ceremonies relating to power and authority are conducted. This is an indication that power and political authority come from the people; thus, the chief takes a public oath on the occasion of his formal investiture of power before his councilors and the populace. This investiture of power takes the form of injunctions, which are read publicly before the chief as a way of defining the matrix of political authority and the kind of relationship between himself, the ruler and the people as the governed (Gyekye, 1997:122).

Some examples of the injunctions that are declared to the chief through his spokesman – the *okyeame* – and which he acknowledged run as follows:

We do not wish that he should curse us.
 We do not wish that he should be greedy.
 We do not wish that he should be disobedient [or, refuse to take advice].
 We do not wish he should treat us unfairly.
 We do not wish that he should act on his own initiative [lit.: “out of his own head,” that is, acting without reference to the views or wishes of the people.]
 We do not wish that it should ever be that he should say to us, “I have no time, I have no time” (Gyekye, 1997:122).

Gyekye narrates that the injunctions are pronouncements of the people’s wish to the chief on how he ought to govern them. Essentially these declarations mean that the people play a key role in determining their own social and political purpose, *telos*. By the words, “we do not wish that” as the introductory antiphon for each injunction, Gyekye points out that:

The declarations are, in one way, an unambiguous assertion of the people’s right to participate in running the affairs of their community or state, in governing themselves; they are, in another way, an indication of the confidence the people have in insisting on the exercise of a political power that will reflect their wishes (Gyekye, 1997:122).

My reading of this is that the pronouncements help to establish a personal bond – of dealing with each other in a humane manner – between the chief and the people. They help to instantiate a relationship of reciprocity and mutuality thereby leading to actualisation of equality and justice that democratic practice requires. They are an expression of the people's awareness and consciousness not only about how they ought to be governed, but they also bring out a sense of their worth as people – recognition of their identity.

This is what makes the socio-political relationship in the traditional polity more unifying since the consequences were spelt out to the chief – the ruler – from the word go. This phenomenon runs contrary to the practice of Western democracy where an oath of office is merely read by an Attorney – in most cases a Chief Justice – to the “leader” designate holding Bible or Quran in his hand. Obviously this points to a lack of personal communion with the people. In many a case, the leader does not feel the sense of obligation to the populace as is the case among the Akan and most traditional African polities as such. It can, arguably, be advanced that it is this fact of the leader not feeling nor appearing to have a sense of obligation to the populace that complicates the notion of the dignity of the human person, equitable distribution of resources, consultation, and acting in concurrence and advice of councilors as was the case in the traditional African political set up; in which case, it can be advanced that the lack of sense of obligation between the ruler and the populace critically diminishes the voice of the people in governance putting both the effectiveness and legitimacy of democracy in contemporary Africa in great doubt. Basically the pronouncements constitute a political contract between the chief and the people, and, as such, render the chief to particularly be a steward of people's political power (Gyekye, 1997:122).

This mode of political operation was replicated in the chief's council as carried out by various clan heads. The councilors as the people's representatives had to confer with the people on any matter to be deliberated upon at the council level. They acted on the advice and with the concurrence of the members of their clan just as the chief himself was under the obligation to act after consulting and obtaining the consent of his

councilors (Gyekye, 1997:123). The councilors lived a life of *representative persona*. They created a free and frank atmosphere for the expression of people's opinions, which enhanced a free discussion of matters affecting the state. This involved listening to arguments – in the case of disagreements – until a consensus was achieved with a reconciliation of opposing views (Gyekye, 197:123). As Gyekye rightly points out, this is what brings to the fore the traditional African communitarian *ethos* that places a great value on solidarity, which in turn engenders the pursuit of consensus. That is to say, every decision adopted by the chief as the highest political authority commanded unanimity as it had been discussed and agreed upon at all other lower levels of assembly. In other words, in the traditional African polity, it is consensus for the sake of attaining the common good that preceded and commanded both political and democratic practices. To a larger extent, this was informed by the spirit of communalism.

3.4.2 Communalism

In this section, I particularly delve into the question of the democratic character of communal values in the traditional African polity. This serves as a launching pad of how such values may be brought to bear on the contemporary democratic practice in Africa. To begin with, it is fitting to revisit and clarify the concepts of community and communalism. A community is a group of persons who are linked by interpersonal bonds – not necessarily biological bonds – and who share common values, interests and goals (Gyekye, 1996:35-6). A community shares an overall way of life. That is to say, in a community, each member acknowledges the existence of community that is expressed through the desire to advance and realise the common good (Gyekye, 1996:36).

Resultantly, therefore, communalism refers to the theory that community is the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society. This does not mean, however,

that the individual lacks an autonomous existence⁴⁴. Rather, it means that the focus of success, whether of the individual or the group, should be the wider society. This should not be to the detriment of the individual but to the wellbeing of every individual. My point of argument here is that human beings are by nature social, and social relationships are essential for every human person since there is not a self-sufficient individual capable of adequate functioning in a social context. Gyekye emphasises this very point by pointing out that “Social life is natural to the human being because every human being is born into an existing society” (Gyekye, 1996:36).

In view of the above, it is to be noted that African society places a lot of emphasis on the community values of human existence. The communal structure of the African society creates a sense of community, which defines social relationships among members of the society (Gyekye, 1996:35). As an enduring feature of the African social life, the theory of communalism, arguably, holds that we humans share enough with others around us. That is, a purely individualistic or jingoistic approach to, or a pattern of life, ceases to be so as long as other people are brought into the picture. Communalism, therefore, is in line with the democratic *ethos* in the sense that it restricts the liberty of leaders to not act without considering the good of all; and, on the part of the populace, it enhances mutuality and sense of dependence. This is what Julius Nyerere called *Ujamaa* or familyhood in Tanzania. As a founding father of the Tanzanian polity he was moved by the great need for unity of the Tanzanians, which he hinged on two main goals – staving off the capitalistic propensity for creating extreme wealth inequality as well as achieving economic self sufficiency.

While Nyerere’s two goals were laudable, *Ujamaa* rested on simplistic idyllic vision. The communal farming in villages depressed in a few years and food production fell. Tanzania became more reliant on food and economic aid than ever before. To my mind, the failure of *Ujamaa* could be attributed to the fact that it was an experiment of one man upon entire country. It lacked the crucial appreciation of political realities taking

⁴⁴ The question of autonomy of existence or simply, “personhood” has been extensively dealt with by Bernard Matolino in his very recent monograph *Personhood in African Philosophy* (2014).

place elsewhere, which could better inform its practice; and most importantly the involvement of the populace to own it from the onset. This arguably is a deliberative aspect that can be advanced to have been lacking in the implementation of *Ujamaa* in Tanzania. I am, therefore, persuaded to think that as a form of African communalism, *Ujamaaa* would have performed better had it appreciated other operative democratic trends of the moment elsewhere.⁴⁵

Against this understanding of communalism, it can be advanced that a well-intentioned democratic government could, by drawing on the wisdom and experience of others, arrive at a reasonable set of beliefs about its citizens' good – the common good, which defines the community's way of life rather than adjusting itself to the patterns of individual and jingoistic interests of the political class (Kymlicka, 1990:206).

In the foregoing respect, it can be argued further that communal values essentially, therefore, are those values that express the appreciation of the worth and importance of the community, and those values that underpin and guide the type of social relations, attitudes, and behaviour that ought to exist between individuals in a community with a sense of the common good (Gyekye, 1996:35). It is in this sense that communalism renders political relevance to democratic practice in Africa's post-independence era through the values of sharing, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocity in obligation, as well as social harmony. In consequence, communalism may be conceived as a stimulant of public interest. To my mind, it assumes the characteristic of equitable treatment of members in a society, and, as such, tames the instinct of greed and plunder by obliging each individual to think and act with an attitude of concern for the other and the common good.

⁴⁵ I am persuaded to advance this argument because Nyerere himself though enthusiastic about *Ujamaa* and being against vast accumulation of wealth and fortune did institute a one party-state of democracy under the guise that multi-party democracy was a luxury that African states couldn't afford. Yet, for increased participation of the populace, this fact does not seem to hold to-date. There is the apparent feeling that democracy in Tanzania (and elsewhere) can thrive with appreciation of other values elsewhere which do not contradict the democracy *sui generis*.

According to Masolo, adherents of communitarianism ascribe to the view that:

The status of the political and moral community have rights that are not just independent from those of individual but are also more important in some crucial ways that warrant the freedoms of the individual for the goodness of the collective whole (Masolo, 2010:222).

My interpretation of Masolo is that individual political rights must take cognizance of human dignity. This is to say that the manner of acting in a communal context – or rather political context – must be restricted by considering the good of others beyond one's own good and interest. As such, what is regarded by the populace as the good of the whole – the greatest good, *summum bonum* - is tied in some important ways to the cultural practices they share with others within the community (Kymlicka, 1990:203). In essence then, communitarianism is the way a person feels and thinks in union with all other people around him or her (Senghor, 1964:94). This explains why Gyekye, in likening communitarianism to the Akan concept of humanism, argues that it ensures the accomplishment of the welfare and the interests of each member of society, which can hardly be realised outside a communal system (Gyekye, 1987:155).

In view of all these perspectives on communitarianism, I argue that communitarianism promotes a traditional liberal attitude and freedoms that enable people to judge what is valuable in life by exploring the different aspects of their shared cultural heritage. In fact, as Masolo points out, communalism represents:

...the sum of all ethical values, all shared experiences and responses, the consciousness of belonging together through history, reinforced by religious and cultural homogeneity (Masolo, 2010:223).

In consequence, it leads to an ethical state where subjective freedom is valued against its contribution to the prescriptions to the common good; that is, to a kind of communal democracy, which can only sustain itself through a process of communication and dialogue leading to consensus on values and cultural norms (Masolo, 2010:224). In

sum, it can be advanced that communalism determines the volume and moral output in the society since it impacts on the rules of upright social conduct by inviting active public – or political – participation in all matters that affect the populace.

3.5 Cultural impediment to democracy in traditional Africa

In spite of the fact that African traditional cultural practices had democratic elements as discussed in the foregoing section, some scholars allude to the fact that undemocratic cultural practices abound in traditional African society. As a result, they see governance in contemporary Africa as intrinsically hostile to ingredients of democracy owing to African traditional cultural influence. In fact, it is often held that the absence of democracy in Africa can be blamed on long-standing political traditions (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997:37). It is against this background that LiPuma and Koelble, who can rightly be referred to as Africanist radicals, argue that:

Traditional leadership, while by no means anti-democratic, is not a guarantee of African democracy. On the contrary, under current conditions it is likely to entrench autocracy, patrimony and despotism... (LiPuma and Koelble, 2009:220).

It is noteworthy that LiPuma and Koelble single out autocracy, patrimony and despotism as some of the undemocratic practices that traditional governance bestowed or can bestow on “democracy”.

Patrimony particularly is regarded as one of the traditional African practices that is regarded as hostile to the democratic practice in Africa. It refers to a political system where an individual rules by dint of personal prestige and power; and ordinary citizens are treated as extensions of the “big man’s” household, with no rights or privileges other than those bestowed by the ruler (Bratton and Van de Valle, 1998:64). As a political

system, it is perceived to be so strong in traditional Africa and it is held to mainly centre on personalisation of power.

In a similar manner Chabal and Daloz see African political leadership as that which is informed more often than not by personal rule, and while citing certain occurrences in African states like the genocide in Rwanda and the political disintegration of Zaire as instances informed by deep-seated cultural practices, they hold the view that African traditional culture is intrinsically hostile to the practice of democracy. They specifically write:

We cannot, for example decide *a priori* that certain forms of African politics (i.e., the genocide in Rwanda, the disintegration in Zaire...) are temporary aberrations which are not representatives of existing trends on the continent (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: xviii).

As a result of this, they further hold the view that colonialism failed to overcome ‘the strongly instrumental and personal characteristics of traditional African administration’. Accordingly, therefore, they are of the opinion that African paternalistic culture is to blame for the crisis of democracy in postcolonial Africa (Chabal and Daloz, 1999:xviii).

In line with the foregoing perspective, Ndlovu-Gatshen associates lack of accountability in contemporary African politics with traditional African cultural practice of patrimony. He argues that some postcolonial African leaders have justified their non-accountable styles of leadership and blatant violation of human rights in terms of African tradition. He cites an occurrence in Benin where Mathieu Kerekou, who was a Marxist dictator, was asked to step down after a long period of presidency and responded by asking whether other than seeing tombs of kings, the people had seen a retired king in Africa (Ndlovu-Gatshen, 2008:376). The implication of this is, in Africa kings do not retire, they only die in power. This is what amounts to patrimony where the individual rules by dint of personal prestige.

My interpretation of these views is twofold. Firstly, these views are tantamount to saying that democracy fails in Africa because African culture does not support it. Secondly, they tend to point to the fact that traditional African culture should be regarded as flagrantly opposed to democracy and democratic values. If my interpretation is correct, then these positions should be taken as logically defeating and indefensible. The failure of an individual person at the helm of political leadership does not invalidate the viability of an institution. While it is largely true, as in the case of Mathieu Kerekou of Benin, that there could be an abuse of power in Africa's traditional polity, contemporary liberal democratic practice has not been spared from such ills either. It would be wrong to equate the failure of an individual to the failure of an institution as such. Such views further commit the fallacy of *non sequitur* by insinuating that because some components of traditional African culture are perceived to be opposed to the practice of "democracy", so democracy fails in Africa. This is tantamount to saying that if some African traditional cultural practices are perceived to be in line with "democracy", then there would not be democratic challenges in contemporary Africa as such. Such argument would be logically unwarranted.

In fact, I choose to argue that such positions are untenable and cannot hold. They simply do not follow since the challenges that democracy faces in Africa are structural and they are well known. They include such realities as poverty, illiteracy, disease, corruption, environmental degradation, civil war, ethnic disputes, *et cetera*, which are indelibly interlinked with the African colonial experience (Crepaz, 2008:9-10). Thus, it is the colonial forms of social organisation and globalisation – and not African culture *per se* – that are to blame for democracy's failure on the African continent. African culture, as I have laboured to show, is politically democratic by any standard of analysis. In fact, African culture should be properly seen as a way out of democracy's problems. As Hountondji observes, "...it will bring an end to shame, [...] and to take fatherland seriously" (Hountondji, 2002:115). In Hountondji's view, it is the way Western democracy is practiced that threatens the cultural identity of a people. Nevertheless, African culture is not flagrantly opposed to the *ethos* of democracy.

3.6 Conclusion

I have pointed out that, in Africa, the absence of democracy was often blamed – by some scholars – on long-standing political traditions of the African peoples. Naomi Chazan, for instance, attributes lack of democracy in Africa to such weaknesses of the connection between state and society, which have a critical bearing on the meaning and influence of democratic norms on the continent (Chazan, 1993:68). What this implies is that African traditional cultural norms are, by their very nature, taken to impact negatively on the principles of a democratic political system. In my understanding, this is what contextualises the “politics of the belly”⁴⁶, which is so rampant in African states; and, which is regarded to be so embedded in the well-established customs, values and informal relationships among Africans. That is to say, ‘politics of the belly’ leads to a situation where “private consumption of public resources undermines and enfeebles state institutions” (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997:38).

Nevertheless, as I argue, the pre-colonial African state was democratic in nature, being largely characterised by participatory and inclusive politics. Thus, the African form of traditional political organisation was that of a stronger participatory and inclusive democracy than the “imported” Western form of liberal democracy practiced in post-independence Africa. If this is granted, then it should form the logical ground on which to reject the Western forms democracy as the sole political type for contemporary Africa in favour of another type, which appreciates African forms of political organisation based on the indigenous traditions of the African peoples.

On the foregoing understanding, it is acceptable to see why some scholars hold the view that the existence and persistence of democracy in certain states in Africa are best

⁴⁶ This concept is a compelling one by Jean-François Bayart in which he sees the democratic behaviour by Africans as occasioned by the material poverty of the continent. Consequently, in such scarcity of resources politics becomes a life-and-death struggle over private access to the limited state resource; and I dare say, state power is used as a means of expropriating such resources. See (Bayart, 1993; Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997).

explained by their being pegged on African traditional practices and way of life. For instance, the survival of democracy in Botswana can be best explained by turning to the pre-colonial Tswana public assembly, the *kgotla*, as a traditional institutional archetype upon which modern democratic arrangements could be modelled and legitimised.⁴⁷ It is in view of this that I am persuaded to conclude that it is the colonial state that instituted an anti-democratic *ethos* that continues to pervade the politics of post-independence Africa.

Crawford Young rightly points out that the external origins and the coercive practices of the colonial state constituted a powerful legacy into the postcolonial period. Resultantly, the post-independence state in Africa inherited colonial structures as well as its quotidian routines (Young, 1994:283). This phenomenon necessitates a revolt against the Western political culture and the demand for African traditional modes of governance, which will ensure that the democratic practice reflects and actually represents a concrete embodiment of authority traditions, and eventually helps to reinforce those traditions.

In the chapter that follows, I take this debate further and examine the manner in which either Western democracy or African traditional democracy can offer a viable democratic theory for contemporary Africa. That is, I undertake a critical and analytical look at how democratic practice in Africa could be animated along some of the traditional institutional frameworks discussed above.

⁴⁷ This view is highlighted by Michael Crowder in the article “*Botswana and the survival of liberal democracy in Botswana*” in *Decolonization and African Independence: The transfers of power 1960-1980*, ed. Prosser Gifford and William Roger Louis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

CHAPTER FOUR

ANIMATING DEMOCRACY: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED CONSENSUAL THEORY

The people for whom the form of government is intended must be willing to accept it; or at least not so unwilling as to oppose an insurmountable obstacle to its establishment. They must be willing and able to do what is necessary to keep it standing.

[John Stuart Mill, *On Representative Government*, 1861]

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the study appraised communalism as an indispensable social order for the practice of democracy. I pointed out that for democracy to be truly and meaningfully established in post-independence Africa it ought to embody philosophical perspectives that underpin African communalism that are in line with the *ethos* of democracy *sui generis*.

In this chapter I seek to look at the possibility of an alternative African concept of democracy. I propose to call this alternative concept of democracy an integrated consensual theory. My contention, in this respect, is that it is a conceptual error to think of a theory of democracy for contemporary Africa in a purely foreign manner, and that there is a need to have a cultural context of democracy. In fact, I will endeavour to show that the cultural context dictates the meaning of democracy in that a culturally bound meaning would not only be easily understood by the citizenry, but also easily acceptable as describing more accurately a people's way of life. Consequently, it is necessary to

utilise indigenous democratic heritage and values that are embedded in the history and cultural vitality of the African people (Teffo, 2004:443).

Such an approach, I seek to further argue; will provide a viable and meaningful theory of democracy founded on the concept of equality and freedom between the rulers and the populace. Arguably, therefore, Africans understand what freedom and democracy mean in their cultural contexts and do not need alien ideologies to define these terms for them – they understand that democracy ideally means equal participation (Moshi and Osman, 2008:213). That is to say, an alternative African theory of democracy should be one whose vital force is freedom as well as accountability of rulers to the governed.

Nevertheless, the realisation of true democracy with such definitive principles remains a mirage in contemporary Africa. It cannot be denied, as I have previously pointed out in this study, that the state in post-independence Africa faces a lot of challenges. Arguably, therefore, one reason that can be advanced to partly account for such a plethora of challenges is that the African state in the post-independence era has held too tightly to its colonial antecedents leading to a situation where Western democracy is regarded as the sole democratic paradigm. This, as Wingo points out, has led to a situation where governance structures are superimposed with foreign political principles and procedures (Wingo, 2000:450).

In view of the foregoing, it is justifiable to argue that what is at stake is to critically re-evaluate the Western conception of democracy, and the need for the West to refrain from imposing ideologies on people of cultures different from their own. On this understanding, this chapter further seeks to point out that what is at stake is the eclectic appraisal of Africa's indigenous democratic values and practices coupled with the ideals from other cultural traditions in order to provide a viable alternative African theory of democracy (Fayemi, 2009:101).

In order to realise this, I will first unravel the concept of democratic theory and then undertake a conceptual analysis of both universalism and traditionalism. I will then give a critical analysis of the eclectic approach as a plausible option toward the establishment of a viable and meaningful alternative democratic theory for contemporary Africa.

4.2 A discourse on the theory of democracy

A theory of democracy, Holden argues, is a body of thought that provides and analyses a conception of democracy together with an explanation and justification of the existence – or possible existence – of democracy (Holden, 1974:66). It is important to note that it is the analysed conception that may be termed as a model of democracy as such. In this sense, a theory of democracy denotes the actual workings as well as actual political systems that are called democratic. In post-independence Africa the extant democratic concept has been that of liberal democracy, which as I earlier pointed out, has both consent and majority rule at the heart of its theoretical expression. Nevertheless, as a concept and form of government, democracy should entail a system that allows the populace freedom to decide their desires (Moshi and Osman, 2005:213). That is, democracy has become a universal phrase used to describe the current political trends especially in third world countries (Adejumobi, 2002:3). Notwithstanding that, it is doubtful whether the concept of liberal democracy appropriately captures what the needs and aspirations of the populace are in contemporary Africa.

In view of the foregoing, it is important to note that the form of democracy that a polity grows should be as a result of complex interactions between geographic, cultural, historical and intellectual experience (Crepaz, 2008:8) As such, given Africa's divergent history, the emergence of democracy on the continent need not necessarily unfold in the same fashion as it did in the developed societies in the West. Democratisation, should as it were, be rightly conceived as a continuous process through which democracy evolves. As Adejumobi rightly points out, it involves the creation and expansion of the political space for various actors to interact, negotiate, compete, and seek self-realisation, within some set of permissible rules (Adejumobi, 2000: 29). All in all, while democratisation is neither an instantaneous occurrence nor

a uni-linear process, as Osaghae argues (1999:7), the end product of its various dimensions, approaches and distinctions is to establish a meaningful and viable democratic order.

Nonetheless, the concept of democracy as outlined above has been largely appropriated as a synonym of liberal democracy, yet it is not the only form of democracy possible, nor does it approximate the concept of democracy in its classical sense. In its classical sense, as Ake rightly argues, democracy is uncharacteristically simple and precise (Ake, 2000:7). It is about popular expression of power by the people as opposed to liberal democracy, which is a political system in which there is the choice of political leaders by the people through competitive elections, a guarantee of civil and political rights, the rule of law, and public accountability (Diamond, 1996, 1997: Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997).

To my mind, the essence of democracy in line with the foregoing is popular power. That is, true and meaningful democracy should rightly be understood as a system of governance that seeks the realisation of human potentialities through active participation in the actualisation of the rulership process. If this is granted, then Ake's argument is correct and defensible that true democracy, on the one hand, enables and empowers while on the other hand, liberal democracy prevents and protects (Ake, 2000:14). In sum, the quiddity of democracy can be said to be trivialised by equating liberal democracy with democracy *per se*.

However, equating liberal democracy with democracy *sui generis* is a logical extension of the nature of the historical developments in Western societies, in which, as Adejumbi points out, property and market society were created and accentuated by the dynamics of industrial as well as technological revolution (Adejumbi, 2002:4). This phenomenon, as he further argues, explains why, in liberal democracy, issues of private property and accumulation are emphasised and are well protected in Western liberal democracies, while those of equality and rights come later (Adejumbi, 2002:5). In consequence, the synergy between liberal democracy and traditional African

democracy should play out in the current search for an alternative democratic theory – true democracy – that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Africans in the post-independence period. There is an urgent need, therefore, to establish the ramifications and functional elements of a liberal democratic project and its linkages with a plausible African democratic mode.

4.3 Universalism and liberal democracy in Africa

Universalism is a process that ensures an increasing homogenisation of all human societies, regardless of their cultural origin and embeddedness (Fukuyama, 1992:xiv). Thus, with respect to the practice of democracy, as Fayemi points out, the Universalist position presents liberal democracy as the model of “democratic” government that should not only be practiced anywhere and everywhere, but also as the most desirable form for universal – or global – embrace (Fayemi, 2009:107).

One of the proponents of the concept of Universalism is Francis Fukuyama. He argues for a Universalist position for liberal democracy by stating that a liberal state is universally victorious. Fukuyama came to this conclusion following the collapse of Communism and the subsequent “victorious” emergence of the United States of America from the Cold War. In Fukuyama’s epistemic orientation, liberalism is a universal phenomenon, and industrial development that characterises it must follow a capitalistic universal pattern set by the West. It is on this understanding that Fukuyama further argues that:

...all countries undergoing economic modernization must increasingly resemble one another; they must unify on the basis of a centralised state, urbanize, replace traditional forms of social organization (like tribe, sect and family) with economically rational ones based on function and efficiency, and provide for universal education [democracy] of their citizens (Fukuyama, 1992:xv).

It can be concluded, following Fukuyama's view, that Western liberal democracy is to be perceived as a universal concept,; and, as such, the only viable system, which should replace any other perceived contesting and even competing "democratic" and economic alternatives.

Universalism, thus, presents Western liberal democracy with a capitalistic economic orientation as the one and only form of human government that any state, including African states, must adopt in order to be considered democratic. That is to say, as Fayemi argues, the Universalist thinking is that liberal democracy is the final form of human government; and that it has proved to be the most viable, desirable and imperative for addressing the challenges of development in third-world nations (Fayemi, 2009:107-108). Of course, such a view cannot hold in contemporary society. This is arguably because, considering Wiredu's distinction between cultural universals and particulars, it is important to point out as he does that "More often than not, the alleged universals have been home-grown particulars" (Wiredu, 1996:2).

In view of the foregoing consideration, it can rightly be advanced that liberal democracy cannot solely be the political panacea for whatever socio-economic and political challenges confront any – African – state on two major accounts. First, such a stance deprives the world's diverse nations of the right to construct their own type of democracy, which corresponds to their social and cultural milieu. To do so would earn universalism a bad name (Wiredu, 1996:2). Nonetheless, as Fayemi rightly argues, the diverse nations of the world have every right, by the fact of their existence, to construct their own conceptions of democracy in line with their religious, economic and social needs (Fayemi, 2009:108).

Secondly, and following logically from the first, I am persuaded to think that a people's way of life – cultural values and traditions – necessarily impact upon the way institutional values and systems are constructed and sustained. To think otherwise, is to think that certain cultures are inherently hostile to democracy *par excellence*, which

would be fallacious since to be democratic is to embrace certain values that enhance human dignity and freedom. To my mind, such values ought to have cultural expression.

In line with the above considerations, it is in order to examine some of the values associated with liberal democracy that make the proponents of the Universalist thesis think that liberal democracy is superior to and victorious over any other system of government the world over. It is on this understanding that I take a critical look into the concept of liberal democracy and its practice with the contention that there is nothing principally amiss in a people or individuals trying to convey tidings of universals or of particulars to other peoples (Wiredu: 1996:2).

4.3 1 The concept of liberal democracy

Political liberalism refers to the rule of law, separation of powers, and the guarantee of the rights of individuals and groups to live their life and pursue happiness as they deem worthy (Wingo, 2004:451). What this means is the fact that democracy as a form of government, in the Western political system, was taken seriously if and only if it connected to the framework of political liberalism. As Wingo postulates, political liberalism and democracy in the United States of America are regarded as an organic whole to the extent that the two are not seen as being distilled from different traditions and history, and, as such, reference to democracy is in actual sense a reference to both ideas (Wingo, 2004:452).

In view of the foregoing, it is agreed that liberal democracy is a political system, which allows citizens to engage in free political competition, periodic multiparty elections, and have respect for individual freedom of thought, expression and assembly. More succinctly, it is a political system in which there is the choice of political leaders by the people through competitive elections, a guarantee of extensive civil and political rights, the rule of law and public accountability (Diamond, 1996, 1997, Bratton and Walle,

1997). It reflects, as Moshi and Osman point out, an Anglo-American cultural bias, which reduces democracy to elections, multiparty system and universal suffrage such that any deviation is to be regarded as an anomaly (Moshi and Osman, 2008:3).

Against this backdrop and conception, Robert Dahl advances three conditions for a well-functioning liberal democracy as: a) extensive competition by political candidates and their groups or parties; b) political participation that provides the choice for the electorate to select candidates in free and fair elections; and c) civil as well as political liberties that enable the citizens to express themselves without fear of punishment (Dahl, 1971:221).

It can be argued that given a situation where all the conditions as postulated by Dahl are met, liberal democracy creates a majoritarian rule. It is this aspect of liberal democracy that necessitates an investigation and critical analysis of its practice.

4.3.2 The practice of liberal democracy

As I have indicated above, liberal democracy is practiced primarily within the matrix of multiparty politics, periodic elections and universal adult suffrage. That is, there must be periodic elections in which individuals compete either independently or as affiliates of political parties for the variously contested political offices. Many scholars have, however, argued that this system of government has failed in many parts of Africa; and as such, it should be replaced by an African type of democracy (Ebo, 1990; Wiredu, 1996, 1997; Teffo, 2004; Moshi and Osman, 2008). They argue that Western democracy – or liberal democracy for that matter – insists on multiparty politics causing political parties to aggregate along class interests to the detriment of African indigenous cultural values of community. Conceived in such a manner, liberal democracy is seen as the source of communal ethnic conflicts, elite abuse of power, majoritarian tyranny and corruption (Moshi and Osman, 2008:3).

Some scholars still argue strongly that even though liberal democracy shares some affinities with the concept of democracy such as political equality, inalienable human rights, right to political participation, accountability to the governed and the rule of law, they are, nevertheless, markedly different (Adejumobi, 2002:4). In the same vein, Ake sees liberal democracy as flagrantly opposed to the African way of life and practice of democracy. He observes that liberal democracy is contrary to African communalism and consensus building, which render sovereignty to the people in a true political and democratic practice. He argues thus:

Instead of collectivity, liberal democracy focuses on the individual whose claims are ultimately placed above those of the collectivity. It replaces government by the people with government by the consent of the people. Instead of the sovereignty of the people, it offers sovereignty of the law. In the final analysis, liberal democracy repudiates popular power (Ake, 2000:10).

Ultimately, therefore, liberal democracy is perceived as a political system that unfortunately thrives on the principle of “tyranny of numbers” leading to a perennial exclusion of the “minorities” from the inner workings of the state thereby causing them to face an insecure future (Rothchild, 2000:11).

As such, it can be argued that the manner in which Universalism presents liberal democracy, though it has some universal features, does not seem to appreciate the fact that local cultures and traditional values certainly impact upon the way democratic values and systems are built and supported (Fayemi, 2009:109). The neglect of the contribution of local cultures to the way democracy ought to be practiced in Africa can arguably be said to be a major contributor to the failure of liberal democracy in post-independence Africa.

Sophine Jane advances her argument along similar lines; while liberal democracy has the potential of guaranteeing development in post-independence Africa, its apparent failure can be explained by the haste of most African states in consolidating their democracies without gradually achieving the developmental pace of the West (Jane, 2002:19). My reading of Jane is that for democracy to be viably and meaningfully established; and bear positively on a people's hopes and aspirations, there ought to be certain favourable conditions in line with the people's social development. In fact, Jane points out that liberal democracy in the West has in its favour economic prosperity and equality enhanced by the phenomenon of industrialisation, which conditions do not prevail in Africa. To this effect, she further points out that democracy in Africa is still in its infancy stages yet it is very eager to ape the developmental pace of the West (Jane, 2002:19). In consequence, liberal democracy, to my mind, should not be a global political-*cum*-governmental prescription without due regard to the particular cultural values that can support it.

In view of the foregoing, an evolution of a meaningful and viable theory of democracy should take cognisance of the fact that true democratic governance ought to instantiate and promote universal human values of dignity and freedom (Fayemi, 2009:109). In essence, if it does not pay attention to such values, then neither universalism nor its political sequel – liberal democracy – can be said to yield a legitimate democratic theory for contemporary Africa. This consideration is what invites an analysis of traditionalism and democracy in Africa.

4.4 Traditionalism and democracy in Africa

As I have pointed out above, the search for an African theory of democracy cannot yield pragmatic results if all it considers is the Universalist approach without taking into consideration African indigenous political practices and values. That is, a viable and

meaningful theory of democracy for modern Africa should appreciate the fact that a people's cultural values and practices are not hostile to the values of democracy *per se*. True democracy must be flexible enough allow a people's local values and systems to inform and support its practice. Otherwise, in the absence of such flexibility – periodic reform and renewal – as Seymour Lipset rightly argues, democracy simply becomes rigid, corrupt and unresponsive to the needs of the people as such (Lipset, 2000:10). Against the foregoing, an analysis of the Traditionalist approach toward the realisation of a meaningful and viable democratic theory for contemporary Africa is, therefore, called for.

To begin with, Traditionalism⁴⁸ is a school of thought which holds that if democracy has to work in Africa and solve the many political challenges that Africa faces at all, then recourse must be taken to African culture itself. That is to say, that the manner in which traditional Africa used to govern itself should be the way to conduct political affairs in contemporary African polity. The Traditionalist school of thought frowns at the way Western democracy is currently gaining ground in contemporary Africa, yet it can neither be sustained nor solve the bulk of crises that beset the continent (Fayemi, 2009:109). The proponents of this approach, notably Kwasi Wiredu, Wamba dia Wamba, Marie Eboh and Francis Ofor among others, are of the view that Western democracy should be jettisoned in lieu of African indigenous democratic culture. These scholars argue that Western democracy was imposed on Africa as a “civilised” system of government under the pretext that pre-colonial Africa's political structures were autocratic and authoritarian in character.

On the other hand, they maintain that a critical look at the socio-cultural history of pre-colonial Africa reveals a democratic structure of rich African political and cultural heritage enshrined in the manner in which leaders of the community were chosen; the principle of checks and balances; and the recognition of and respect for the rights and freedoms of others. They contend that African political structure had representational

⁴⁸ Fayemi uses the term Traditionalism to denote a school of thought in the discourse on the state of democracy in Africa that frowns at the manner in which democracy is practiced on the continent in modern times (Fayemi, 2009: 109).

and participatory features which were *ipso facto* democratic.⁴⁹ These views invite a critical analysis of the nature and practice of African indigenous democracy in the pre-colonial era.

4.4.1 Democratic practice in traditional Africa

Before I delve into a specific analysis of the argument of the Particularist scholars – the proponents of Traditionalism – I present a brief description of how democratic leadership was conducted among the Yoruba people in pre-colonial times. My point of argument is, other than being a well-documented example, traditional Yoruba democratic leadership is similar to what is found in many other traditional societies across Africa. The question to answer here is: To what extent was the Yoruba system of government in pre-colonial times democratic? In an attempt to answer this question, I address myself to the political practices such as “choice” of leaders, the principle of checks and balances, the idea of respect and rights of individuals as well as the features of participation and representation. I contend that these were rightfully aspects or moments of democracy among the Yoruba people.

To begin with, Akintoye informs us that the pre-colonial Yoruba societies were kingdom based. The ruler of the whole Kingdom was called *Oba*, King. Each Kingdom comprised of a central town and several villages. There were subordinate towns and villages under a subordinate ruler known as *Baale*, village head. Each town was divided into four and put under a “quarter chief”. Each quarter was made up of many nuclear families with same ancestral descent. Each family compound had a family head called *Olori ebi* (Akintoye, 2009:1). The crucial point to note here is that each of these societal stratifications was interconnected with all the others with respective governments. Yunusa Kehinde Salami points out that the choice of who governed at these levels was done through a democratic means – age and prominence in the ancestral tree (Salami, 2006:69). The family was the nucleus of the Yoruba system of

⁴⁹ This view is held by, among others, Wiredu (1996), Tangwa (1998) and Salami (2006).

government. In the family compound, there was the corporate existence of members – each member had property right and duties. Members deliberated on the affairs of the family and settled disputes at family compound meetings that were frequently held. It is to be noted that it was in such family meetings that democratic features of governance were exhibited as every member had full rights to express his/her views and opinions (Akintoye, 2009:3). It was the responsibility of the family head to ensure that not only was every member's opinion heard, but also that each of them was encouraged to freely express it. In consequence, participation was each member's duty. Any member who habitually failed to honour such duty risked being considered abhorrent in the family compound (Akintoye, 2009:3). Thus, participation was a critical democratic phenomenon most notably at the choice of a king.

Among the Yoruba, the choice of a king was *ipso facto* a demonstration of democracy in that it defined the democratic nature of the political system. This was held to be arguably so because, at the death of a king, ascendancy to the throne did not automatically pass to the deceased king's sons. Akintoye says that candidates would emerge from other royal families including all the male members of the royal family group. The fact of the matter here is that all candidates to the *Obaship* – sons and even grandsons of former kings – were all eligible for selection as *Oba* and treated as equal candidates. The power to carry out the selection of *Oba* on behalf of the people was vested in the standing committees of chiefs, known as the Council of Kingmakers. It was this Council with consultation with the Oracle, *Ifa* that guided and authenticated the selection process (Akintoye, 2009:3).

In the foregoing respect, the Council was all-powerful but its decision was not arbitrary since there were laid down principles and norms that strictly guided the final decision on who became the king. Such guidelines included firstly, personality and historical background of the candidate as well as his moral disposition. Secondly, there was the expression of the public opinion on the prince. In consequence, to succeed in this process, a candidate's choice had to be supported by the majority of the Council of Kingmakers upon overwhelming merits in the historical, personality and the moral

yardsticks used in the process of this determination. After meeting these mundane requirements, the support of *Ifa* was sought; and once it was received, the ritual of ascending to the throne would then begin. It is within this context, coupled with *Ifa*'s approval, that the King occupied the highest seat of the Kingdom.

In his book *The sociology of the Yoruba*, N. A. Fadipe alludes to the fact that even though the king sat on the highest seat of the kingdom, his exercise of power was only within the matrix of the first among equals, *primus inter pares*. In this sense, the king was the "first" among, but equal with, his councillors. His function as the head of the council was to oversee the general health of the society, which entailed internal security, issues of peace and war as well as the administration of justice (Fadipe, 1970:206).

In conclusion, the nature and practice of the Yoruba indigenous government – as was the case with other African communities – was such that political arrangement provided for checks and balances. This was further explicated in the fact that if a king behaved in such a manner that he tried to establish his own personal power beyond the limits of the limited monarchy system, or if he became tyrannical, greedy, *et cetera*, some chiefs would talk to him; and if he failed to amend his ways, the matter would be taken to the special council of spiritual elders, namely the *Ogboni*, at which Council he would be seriously warned. Following failure to heed the *Ogboni*, quarter chiefs alerted the family heads to inform their compound meetings of the final action that would be taken against the king – being presented with an empty calabash or parrot's eggs as a sign that the king had to, and compulsorily so, evacuate the office (Fayemi, 2009:112). This process of checks and balances, in my reading, was indicative of the fact that the king was a mere custodian of the people's power. The Yoruba indigenous government, it can be held, was a people-centred democracy.

In respect to the foregoing exposition, it is plausible to advance that the system was based on the rule of law – constitutionalism. Salami argues that this system was

democratic to the extent that rules were strictly followed (Salami, 2006:74). There was also the participation of the different levels and cadres of the society (Salami, 2006:75).

4.4.2 The Traditionalist argument and African democracy

In the discourse on viable and meaningful democratic theory for contemporary Africa, proponents of the Traditionalist thesis, in principle, argue against the Universalist standpoint and liberal democracy. There is an apparent “negative” feeling among scholars in this camp that what passes as democracy for Africa today is nothing but Western “democratic” prescriptions⁵⁰. It is held that there is an unfortunate imposition of Western political values, which are not suitable for the African situation. For Wamba, democracy should be seen in Africa as a process of emancipation, self-determination and the meeting of the needs of the African people. He writes:

...democratization has to be considered as a process to win, defend and protect the rights of the people and the individual against the one-sidedness—including the right of self organization for autonomy and not necessarily right of participation in the state process (Wamba, 1990:127).

Marie Eboh, in her article titled “*Is Western Democracy the answer to the African Problem?*” argues that Western democracy is not an authentic expression of an African political culture. She sees democracy as culturally relative; and that the solution to Africa’s contemporary governance challenges must not be sought for in the Western type of democracy, but rather, in every effort that seeks to address the socio-economic and political realities of contemporary Africa, which may, in the long run, lead to an African style of democracy. Without giving democracy an African flair as Eboh seems to suggest, there are bound to be perpetual governance challenges in Africa. She,

⁵⁰ Wamba dia Wamba (1990) particularly argues that since the inception of democracy in Africa, Africa is subjected to a situation where it has to consume what the West articulates as “democracy”.

therefore, concludes that there is a need for an African democracy, which addresses the specific issues that face the African continent (Eboh, 1990:167).

Both views of Wamba and Eboh are expressive of the simple fact that Western democracy is unsuitable for Africa and that an African culture-centric type of democracy should be allowed to emerge in order to replace it. While it is admissible that democracy should address itself to the socio-economic and political conundrums of contemporary Africa; and that it should answer to the questions that the people for which it is meant are asking, it should, however, be remembered that there are certain fundamental values of democracy *sui generis*, which cut across any cultural divide. I contend that such values ought to be regarded as fundamental fabric for constructing true and viable democracy for any society, their historical emergence notwithstanding.

Such fundamental values of democracy, to my mind, constitute what I prefer to call the grounds for accepting democracy as a political system of government in which the people rule. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the grounds upon which democracy may be favoured as a political system can be either “moral” or “non-moral”. That is to say, democracy may enable people to pursue their own interest – non-moral purpose; or to secure liberty, justice, *et cetera* – moral consequence. Nonetheless, democracy may well be favoured for its own intrinsic value, as a good-in-itself; in which case it may be regarded as a system of governance which involves treating people with respect and dignity proper to them as human beings granted them by nature.

Some scholars have argued that the ground for democracy is of moral concern. David Beetham, for instance, asserts that the purpose of democracy should be the enjoyment of equality of the right to take part in decision-making (Beetham, 1983:55). My reading of Beetham is that there is no way democracy as a political system can be divorced from morality. If this is granted, then it is plausible to advance the argument that if democracy and morality are kept separate, they render conflict inevitable since the interpretation of ‘rule by the people’ which fits the requirement, for example, of liberty and justice, may

clash with that of enabling people to pursue their interests. If this happens, then it would be necessary to adjudicate between the purposes themselves. However, it would be simplistic to suppose that an acceptable form of democracy would rest on one such purpose to the exclusion of all others. In consequence, the grounds for democracy should be properly hinged on the fact that individual human beings are dignified persons with rights – intrinsic property. Some obvious examples of such intrinsic values or property of democracy include liberty or freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, and subsequently, the common good. I will briefly discuss each of these grounds of democracy and argue that the common good constitutes the highest intrinsic value since all other grounds lead to its attainment.

a) Freedom

To my mind, a well-constructed political system should serve the purpose, *telos*, for which human beings exist, namely happiness. Arguably, liberty or freedom is a necessary element of happiness, and consequently of democracy. This is because freedom requires that people exercise their own individual judgment in the practice of democracy. Pope John Paul II, in his Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, argues that freedom must define the citizen in a democratic setting as an “autonomous subject of moral decision” (John Paul II, 1991:29).

In the same vein, J. S. Mill, an eminent advocate of individual freedom, argues that freedom is the absence of external constraints on the individual. Mill further argues that the individual should be free from the state since “a person who is deprived of freedom and of the possibility of earning a living through his own initiative, comes to depend on the social machine and those who control it” (Mill, 1983:349). According to Mill, therefore, if a person is deprived of freedom, then it is difficult for him to recognize his dignity as a person, and this hinders progress towards the building up of an authentic democratic government.

My reading of Mill is that an authentic democratic government cannot be realised without reference to an individual's exercise of free choice. That is, the realisation of true democratic order critically depends on the exercise of an individual's unique and exclusive responsibility bestowed on him or her by nature. Arguably in this sense, therefore, freedom of the individual is important in two ways; firstly, it promotes the individual's dignity as a person; and secondly, because progress in any matter depends on contribution from persons who can think for themselves, true democracy can only be brought about by individuals who are free and are able to think for themselves as such.

Still, while free development of the individual is important for the realisation of true democracy, in contemporary time and the age of industrialization such as ours, there is a fear that a monolithic society would ensue and such a society would infringe upon individual rights. In consequence, there is a need to define the nature and limits of society's power over the individual. It is to be noted that conflicts between the interests of the individual and those of the society are bound to occur, yet they must be resolved in the best way possible. The only circumstance in which the individual can be restrained is when he or she acts in a manner which is harmful to the society. The restraint, nevertheless, should be understood as an effort towards the preservation of the society.

In sum, freedom produces a higher type of individual with the requisite ability to tolerate and establish mutuality with others necessary for the establishment of a meaningful and viable democratic polity. If granted, then, freedom by its very nature presupposes justice in a democratic polity.

b) Justice

A system of government cannot be fully or meaningfully democratic and rooted among the people, unless it is also grounded on the concept of justice in order to actualize happiness of the citizenry (SECAM, 1988:4). Terence Irwin presents a Platonic

argument to the effect that justice is *conditio sine qua non* for the establishment of an ideal state, in that it is only when the state is ruled by the virtuous that justice can be realized. He narrates Plato's analogy of the soul and the state and rightly points out that justice in the state is the condition in which the rational, the emotional and the appetitive parts of the soul all do their work (Irwin, 1977:204). This analogy outlines Plato's conception of the state as composed of the philosophers as the rulers of a polity; the auxiliaries as the administrators; and the labourers as the producers with corresponding virtues of wisdom, courage and temperance.

It is in view of the foregoing, as Gunnar Skirbekk and Nils Gilje rightly point out, Plato conceives justice as a virtue, which is connected with the community, that is, the citizenry of the state. In other words, justice is the harmony among the three virtues of wisdom, courage and temperance. Consequently, the ideal polity is not only thought of from the perspective of theoretical moral demands, but also as one with reciprocal satisfaction of needs. Thus, the wise think, the courageous defend and the temperate produce (Skirbekk and Gilje, 2001:57).

Accordingly, therefore, I am persuaded to advance the view that justice is complementarity. It not only entails doing that which one is disposed to do, but also that which he or she is equipped to do. In consequence, what is required of people in a democracy, as Fredrick Copleston argues, is for people to complement one another so that everyone actively participates in supplying the natural needs. In fact, as he further postulates, a democratic polity should not only further the economic needs of man, since man is not simply an 'economic man', but also his happiness; to develop them in the good life in accordance with the principles of justice (Copleston, 1946:226).

In the foregoing respect, it can be argued that justice contributes to the wholeness of being in a democracy. Its essence consists in the agreement between the leaders and the governed with their respective roles. In Africa, justice should be conceived as a social cooperation for the common good. Individualism or egoism, where an individual

perceives himself or herself as the centre and purpose of all activity motivated by self-gain, adulterates the very concept of justice in an African set-up where existence is defined in a perichoretical *modus vivendi*, mode of life, as captured by the Mbitian expression, “I am because We are and since We are, therefore, I am” (Mbiti, 1969:16).

In essence, it can be argued that in an African perichoresis, the “We” is reminiscent of Plato’s idea that the society is not something external to a self-sufficient individual, but that the person is always part of the community. In other words, the individual is not a demarcated entity cut off from the rest of the community members but essentially there exists a dialectical interpenetration and connection between *I*–the individual and *We*–the community, in which neither *I* nor *We* can claim full primacy (Nwoye, 2006:129).

In sum, in a true, viable and meaningful democracy, as in Plato’s ideal state, everybody should do what he or she is most capable of. This should be the basis for the harmonious interplay between the rulers and the governed, and among the populace themselves and their professional functions as characteristic of a just state. It is this consideration that sets the ground for equality as a ground for democracy.

c) Equality

Equality means that ‘adequate opportunities’⁵¹ are laid bare to all in a polity. That is, all those opportunities, which are considered to be essential and without which life is all but a frustration, should be given to individuals within the state. To ground democracy on equality is to allow each person to have complete freedom in all those matters that

⁵¹ I choose to underline that there is a distinction between “adequate opportunities” and “equal opportunities”. The former does not mean the latter. Equality is a problem in proportion. It is because of this that we talk of adequate opportunities, since every individual must have those things without which life is meaningless. All human beings eat, drink and obtain shelter. It is to be noted, even in ordinary existence, that we cannot have equality of wages as there is not equality in capacity of work.

concern him/her for the realisation of his/her destiny and the common good. This is the basic equality of all persons, which stems from the fact that all men (persons?) are endowed with a rational soul – that is, they have the same nature and same *telos* as far as democratic governance is concerned. This is reminiscent of Kant’s categorical imperative in which case the populace and the political elite must work out of duty. This implies that power should not allow leaders to use others as a mere means to some end. Good democratic practice demands a co-joint effort of both the leaders and the populace. Nevertheless, I am not oblivious to the fact that not all are alike as regards physical capacity and intellectual prowess. There are certainly rightful differences between people. I, therefore, argue for equality of dignity about which John Locke as an ardent defender rightfully writes:

A state of equality, wherein all power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born by all the same advantage of nature, and the ease of the same faculties should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection, unless the Lord and Master of them all should by any manifest declaration of His will set one above another, and confer on him by an evident and clear appointment an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty (Locke, 1963:169).

In view of the above, it is the equality of men (humanity? persons?) by nature that makes it a foundation of true democracy. That is, equality makes democracy to be at the service of human dignity and destiny by ensuring that all individuals be treated alike in political decision-making – all must be included and enfranchised.

In consequence of the foregoing argument, a democratic polity must strive for “democratic equality”⁵². This means that every individual is equal before the law and should enjoy the same status in the sphere of private law.

⁵² Democratic equality operates in the context of every individual being treated with equal dignity regardless on one’s status in the society.

d) The Constitution – Rule of Law

In common parlance, a meaningful and viable democratic system of government should be based on the 'rule of law', that is, rules and regulations that are laid down by the Legislature, implemented by the Executive and adjusted by the Judiciary. The grounding of democracy on the Constitution, therefore, is of paramount importance because the rule of law assumes that every citizen will assimilate the principles and ideals of citizenship as the basis of exercising his or her rights and claiming the same from the state.

Fairfield Roy observes that the Constitution must have the ability to make democracy influence the actions and thoughts of the populace even if they resist. That is, since in a democracy factions between the loser and the victor are almost inevitable, it is the Constitution that must break and control the violence of factions (Roy, 1961:16). It is against this observation that I am persuaded to argue that the plausibility of grounding democracy on the Constitution as the supreme law is validated on two accounts. First, since it is the control of the inevitable war of factions in a democracy, it destroys the liberty which is essential to its existence; and secondly, it gives to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests. In sum, the law simply ensures that all citizens are equal before it, and it is a necessary condition for the attainment of the common good in a democratic polity.

e) The Common Good

The African social organisation as I have pointed out earlier on in this study is that of communalism, which is premised on the fact that the good of all determines the good of each individual. That is, the sense of community, properly understood, is what defines and constitutes the common good. In other words, the common good should be properly understood in the context of the welfare of each individual being dependent on the welfare of all as such.

Gyekye offers a definition of the common good in his narration of the Akan art motif of the “Siamese” crocodile: a crocodile with two heads but one stomach (Gyekye, 1995:159). He contends that the proverb that is connected with this symbol is indicative of the fact that even though the two crocodiles have a common stomach, they always struggle over food. While Gyekye acknowledges that there are various lessons that can be drawn from this motif, he particularly points out that “the common stomach symbolizes the common good” (Gyekye, 1995:160). It is in view of this that he goes on and describes the common good as “the good of all individuals embraced within a society” (Gyekye, 1995:160). It is important to note that against this description, Gyekye clearly points out that the common good is not merely the sum of various individual goods, but rather that there are certain needs which are basic to the enjoyment and fulfilment of the life of each individual. He identifies such needs to include things like shelter, food, health, equality of opportunity and liberty (Gyekye, 1995:160).

It is on the foregoing understanding that I argue that a true, meaningful and viable democratic order should be grounded on the idea of the common good since, as it stands, it is predicated on a true and essential universal – the good of all; that which is, in Gyekye’s description, essentially good for human beings as such (Gyekye, 1995:160). To my mind, this is what makes the common good to be the *conditio sine qua non* for the establishment of a true, meaningful and viable democratic order in any society.

Nevertheless, the common good is not conceptually opposed to the individual good of any member of the society. It in effect embraces the good of the individual as it does embrace, too, the good of the society – other members. As such, if the common good is attained, then the individual good is also attained for, as Gyekye postulates, there cannot be any conflict between the two since they are actually tied together and indeed overlap (Gyekye, 1995:160). In consequence, the possibility of attainment of the common good is closely tied to the idea of communality; it is embedded in the fact of reciprocity among human beings, that is, the individual identifying himself or herself with the group.

What all this indicates is the fact that the project of establishing a true, viable and meaningful democratic order in post-independence Africa should, other than dismissing the Universalist approach as being a Western imposition of a system of governance, look for the fundamental principles that define democracy as a good-in-itself. In consequence, I am persuaded to argue that in the search for an African theory of democracy, neither a purely Traditionalist approach nor a purely Universalist scheme can irrefutably pass as an alternative political paradigm in the post-independence era.

In my view, a plausible alternative African theory of democracy in contemporary times should be gauged against, and incorporate, the fundamental values of democracy as well as the African indigenous cultural values. It is this consideration that necessitates an analysis of those “democratic” values of the African indigenous political system that can be brought to bear on meaningful democratic practice.

4.4 3 Values of African indigenous democracy

To my mind, one of the values of African indigenous democracy, and possibly the reason why an African type of democracy is preferred to the Western type, is embedded in the fact that it is specific to the culture of the African people. It is a democracy that emerged against the communal life set-up of the Africans. This is to say that African indigenous type of democracy reflected the ordinariness of the people’s way of life. It was a democracy of the people’s *lebenswelt*. In contradistinction to the Western democratic type, which is imposed under the guise of “civilising” the Africans, and under the pretext that democracy must be practiced in strict adherence to Western conception of it, African indigenous democracy has the flair of the African communal mode of life, *modus vivendi* (Offor, 2006:121). Conversely, what constitutes the failure of democracy in Africa is the fact that Western democracy is not congruent with the

people's way of life. Nevertheless, democracy must be allowed to emerge from the socio-political and cultural context of a people. What this means, as Abraham argues, is that in a communal system of life, political power is essentially derived from the people, and the leader only holds it in trust. In fact, in traditional African political life, the king was only a representation of the unity of the people (Abraham, 1962:77).

Following logically from the above consideration, is another fundamental value of traditional African democratic order, namely dialogue and consultation in the decision making process. K.A. Busia captures this value of African democracy when he writes:

When a Council, each member of which was the representative of a lineage, met to discuss matters affecting the whole community, it had always to grapple with the problem of representing sectional and common interests. In order to do this, the members had to talk things over; they had to listen to all different points of view. So strong was the value of solidarity that the chief aim of the counsellors was to reach unanimity, and they talked till this was achieved (Busia, 1967:28).

It is on this understanding that, in the article titled "*Democracy by Consensus: Some Conceptual Considerations*", Wiredu offers an elaborate discussion on what he conceives to be the nature and role of parties if a political system is of a consensual type. He argues:

All parties to any group deliberation that produces consensus are party to the decision reached. This contrasts sharply with majoritarian decision-making. Here the decision is the wishes of one group or group of groups as *opposed* to another. In politics this usually means the majority party. They are the winners, and the others are the losers. The notion of *party* has occurred three times in this paragraph. In its first occurrence it means an individual or group of individuals with an interest or concern in a given issue or project. In the second it is used adjectivally to mean being a participant in a decision, and in the third it is used in the well-known political sense in which a party is a group of people, basically of like mind, organized with the aim of winning governmental power (Wiredu, 2001:238).

He uses numerical subscripts to track the differences in the above postulated senses; and wonders whether parties would actually have any role to play in a polity where decision making is arrived at through consensus. He aptly argues that:

Consensus, as may be gathered from all the above, may be characterized (in the absence of an antecedent unanimity) as an agreement arrived at by all the members of a group through rational dialogue and mutual accommodation. Consensus can be obtained in both political and non-political contexts, but let us restrict ourselves to political consensus. It is obvious that if consensus becomes the decision procedure of a nation's deliberating body, the distinction between government and opposition would lose its *raison d'être*. If all parties₁ are party₂ to the decision, there is nothing to oppose and there is no need of a party₃ to do the opposing (Wiredu, 2001:238).

Wiredu is even more categorical in pointing out the non-necessity of existence of a political party in a democratic polity when he further writes that, "On the other hand, there will always be parties₁ wanting to be party₂ to the decision that affects them" (Wiredu, 2001:238). He contends that party₁ is to be conceived as an association of those citizens interested in the promotion of political ideas and policies rendering it to be the only plausible manner of conceiving the concept party in a polity; and in which respect a political party, properly understood, is rendered not only undesirable and unnecessary but also non-existent. It is in this context that he writes:

Anyone who tries to take liberties with the citizen's right to form or belong to a party₁ of his choice is trifling with one of the most fundamental of human rights, namely, the right of free expression, association being a form of expression. In a consensual dispensation then, there will be parties₁ but no parties₃. The same thought may be illuminatingly expressed in other terms. Obviously, a set of political conventions or constitutional provisions that envisages a consensual system of politics will not include a rule that mandates that party₃ that is victorious at the polls gets into governmental power to the exclusion, normally, of

other parties₃, since there will be no such parties in that system (Wiredu, 2001:238-239).

Wiredu's consensual prescription admits the existence of parties₁ and vehemently rejects the existence of parties₃ such that his argument of a non-party polity only applies to the latter and not the former. To my mind, Wiredu's position on a non-party polity with this admission is rather inadequate. It is simply not clear what Wiredu seems to mean by a non-party polity. There is an apparent confusion between the concepts of party and opposition. If my reading is correct, then his distinctions of parties_{1,2,&3} is misleading and unwarranted. To admit that parties₁ are an association of those citizens interested in promoting their preferred political ideas and policies and still proceed to dismiss parties₃ merely as an opposition in a consensual scheme is to miss the point in a big way. It can still be argued that the reason for which parties₃ are constituted is also to promote their preferred political ideas and policies, which is "opposing". If this is granted, then there is no significant political difference between parties₁ and parties₃ as such.

In the article titled "*The nature of opposition in Kwasi Wiredu's democracy by consensus*", Matolino offers a plausible critique to Wiredu's concept of non-party consensual polity⁵³. He outlines a threefold criticism, namely, that the meaning Wiredu attributes to the term party cannot pass without challenge since the characterisation of parties₁ and parties₃ are actually political parties – a fact that Wiredu appears to deny (Matolino, 2013:145-6). Secondly, Matolino shows the incoherency in Wiredu's depiction of one-party state as a combination of party_{1,3} (2013:146). He finally points out that Wiredu fails to spell out how consensus is attained during the deliberations that lead to parties being party₂ to decisions (Matolino, 2013:150). Matolino concludes by pointing out that while there are attractions in Wiredu's consensual democracy, the way he depicts the nature and role of political parties is problematic (Matolino, 2013:151).

⁵³ My intention is not to give a full exposition of Matolino's critique of Wiredu's notion of a non-party consensual scheme for that is not within the scope of this study. Rather, I wish to highlight that the way Matolino captures Wiredu's incoherencies sheds more light into the way parties and their role ought to be understood in contemporary democratic practice.

To my mind, inasmuch as Wiredu vehemently admits the existence of different views and standpoints of interlocutors, the principles that guide “political parties” in the practice of liberal democracy and the various camps in Wiredu’s consensus building remain practically the same. Besides, each individual in party₁ insofar as he or she is entitled to his or her views – opinions – in consensus building, constitutes an identity, a “political party” in its own right if his or her views are not to be taken for granted.

Arguably, therefore, there are as many political parties in consensus building as there are members in the deliberating process. This is what can be equated to multiparty politics where each political party has its own political manifesto. Perhaps what is different is the fact that liberal democracy has institutionalised the camps into political parties. Thus, the process of deliberation, which promotes tolerance, mutuality and concern for the other, is not flagrantly opposed to the principle of multi-party politics in modern times.

In line with the above consideration, the legitimation of consensual or a purely traditional socio-political order as the only panacea for democratic maladies in contemporary Africa is highly dubitable and cannot pass. This necessitates an eclectic approach to the question of African theory of democracy.

4.5 Eclecticism and democracy in Africa

As I have so far presented and analysed in this study, both the Universalist and Particularist schools of thought in the search for an African theory of democracy represent extreme positions. The eclectic approach assumes the position that virtue lies in the middle, *virtus in medio*, and reconciles the extremities of both the universalistic and particularistic orientations. According to the eclectic approach, the search for an

African theory of democracy in post-independence Africa should not only adopt democratic values and principles of indigenous African culture, but also those democratic ideas and values that have developed in other cultures as well (Fayemi, 2009:118). Proponents of this school of thought, notably Kwame Gyekye, E.A. Ruch, K.C. Anyanwu and Kolawole Owolabi among others, argue that those ideas from other cultures that are not opposed to democracy-in-itself may contribute to meaningful and sustainable democratic practice in modern Africa.

Accordingly, scholars of the eclectic school of thought argue that the search for a true and viable democracy for contemporary Africa should not be a mere return to Africa's traditional past, nor a sheer replication of Western modes of political governance (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1981:305). Gyekye, in particular, is of the opinion that for Africa to have a meaningful democracy there should be a recourse and commitment to Africa's indigenous democratic ideas and institutions. He argues that some of the democratic ideals evident in the traditional African socio-political organisation could be incorporated in contemporary democratic practice (Gyekye, 1997:120).

Democratic stability and sustainability in contemporary Africa is a matter of methodological concern, which is possible if and only if we establish, as Gyekye further argues:

...indigenous ways and means of hammering the autochthonous democratic elements as well as elements inherited from alien source...into acceptable and viable democratic form in the setting of the modern world (Gyekye, 1997:43).

In sum, Gyekye sees the African traditional political values as a panacea to the challenge of establishing a viable and meaningful democratic theory for modern Africa. He contends that democratic values are not alien to African political cultures; and yet such values "have not been allowed to affect and shape the contours of modern African politics" (Gyekye, 1997:135).

In view of the foregoing argument, K. A. Owolabi maintains that traditional African culture has both democratic and undemocratic values. As such, a return to the African past for a plausible foundation of democracy in modern Africa should be approached with caution. Nevertheless, he observes that a viable and meaningful democracy for post-independence Africa could be developed from the amalgam of ideas from both traditional African culture as well as that of other societies (Owolabi, 2003:443). Consequently, it is erroneous to think that democratic institutions that originated in the West cannot be successfully utilised in Africa. He maintains that whatever facilitated the workability of those democratic values and institutions in those “foreign” worldviews, would take course in Africa as such (Oluwabi, 2003:443).

In line with the above considerations, it is clear that the extreme positions of both the Universalist and Particularist cannot yield to a viable and meaningful democratic theory for contemporary Africa. In fact, the way traditionalists present consensual democracy, for instance, as superior to liberal democracy cannot hold, and can be faulted on two accounts. Firstly, such a view puts both systems at war with each other in a manner that implies that they are both flagrantly opposed to each other. In my thinking, they are not since they are both typologies of democracy of distinct socio-cultural emergence and expression.

Secondly, a perception that puts liberal democracy over and above the traditional African form and *vice versa* is tantamount to saying that democratic institutions and values that originated in other worldviews cannot successfully be utilised elsewhere other than their respective ontology of origin. If this is granted, then an eclectic approach is more viable by arguing that whatever facilitated the workability of democratic ideals in their “primitive” worldviews can, as a matter of principle, be employed for sustainable democratic practice in any society including Africa. In sum, following the eclectic approach, this study arrives at an African theory of democracy known as “Integrated Consensual Democracy”, which incorporates values and institutions found in both the Western and traditional African democratic practices.

4.6 Towards a theory of ‘Integrated Consensual Democracy’

One of the most fundamental arguments that this study has so far established is that there is a problem of the disjuncture that exists between the rulers and the governed in contemporary democratic practice in Africa. As a result of this, democratic governance, which is supposed to give preference to the people by making their will explicit and real in concrete terms, is greatly jeopardised. Its closeness to the people has not been felt so as to qualify as a system in which the government stays closer to the people and the people closer to their government (Nyerere, 1998). It is in this regard, therefore, that it is right and fitting to bridge this chasm with a view to making democracy more viable and meaningful for Africa in modern times. I am persuaded to advance that it is in the absence of a viable and meaningful democratic theory for contemporary Africa, as Adetulla argues that:

...many potential conflicts have intensified with increased destabilising capacity. Poverty and deteriorating living conditions have exacerbated identity conflicts along communal, ethnic, religious and regional lines (Adetulla, 2011:17).

I, therefore, propose the theory of ‘Integrated Consensual Democracy’ as a possible panacea to contemporary Africa’s democratic challenges. I argue that the theory of Integrated Consensual Democracy is hinged on the concept of public deliberation, which is a process by which members of a political community – guided by the commitment to the common good – participate in public discussion and critical examination of collectively binding policies. In the section that follows, I provide an analysis of how integrated consensual democracy can be achieved by delving into what constitutes its nature.

4.6.1 The nature of 'Integrated Consensual Democracy'

It has been argued that the complex nature of contemporary society may render the democratic credentials of traditional Africa incompatible with the demands of modern forms of political governance (Fayemi, 2009:119). Nevertheless, the nature of Integrated Consensual Democracy, which emanates from eclecticism, provides a roadmap on how to incorporate the universalistic and particularistic values and institutions into a viable and meaningful democracy in contemporary Africa.

To begin with, I look at the phenomenon of voting. It is to be remembered that advocates of traditional form of democracy charge that liberal democracy gives the people who are meant to be the focus of any system of government, a “negative role” as far as voting is concerned. That is, people are given the role of passively choosing between options presented to them. This, they maintain, reduces the fact of voting to a meagre exercise, a periodic ritual over which they have no meaningful control.

This position, as I argue, is admissible on the grounds that the choices that citizens get involved in have a twofold dimension. They concern personnel on the one hand; and policy on the other hand. The problem with liberal democracy as regards voting is, therefore, that policy options are broad and general rather than specific and detailed. Arguably, this amounts to what can be associated with the idea that elected representatives have greater knowledge and more wisdom than the populace. They prescribe to the electorate what they think the electorate wants.

Resultantly, in liberal democracy it is perceived that the elected representatives should have considerable autonomy in making political decisions while remaining within the overall control of the people. To this extent, liberal democracy could be faulted on the idea of voting. However, the idea itself cannot be wished away on the simple ground of being a foreign import, as Wiredu argues and would want us to believe. To do so is to

miss the point and to refuse to see the inevitable and positive side of voting not only in a system of government, but also on every matter that invites divergent opinions in everyday life.

In Integrated Consensual Democracy, voting has a positive connotation such that the people actually initiate policies. The idea of representation is, thus, reworked such that representatives are not the know-it-all as proponents of consensual democracy would want us to believe; but rather they are “controlled” by their electors and are little more than messengers conveying the decision of their constituents. It is in this sense that I am persuaded to conclude that the idea of voting can be said to tie up with ordinary consensus in that it leads to what is properly speaking termed “delegated representation” (Gyekye, 1997, Abraham, 1962).

In essence, the populace does not only initiate policies, but also makes detailed and specific decisions about what affects them in the ordinariness of their everyday lives. In Integrated Consensual Democracy the populace does more than vote. While in ordinary consensus voting may be equated to the populace engaging in the act of thinking and discussing policies as well as engaging in activities that either form or replace part of the very process of government, for instance, becoming a local council or helping to run community services, in integrated consensual democracy the idea of voting is preceded by a metaphysical worldview, that is a way of looking at the world and democracy as a good-in-itself.

Voting in Integrated Consensual Democracy as can be deduced from Osman Edim Temple is, thus, a manifestation of a sincere commitment to democracy *sui generis* and not some selected items for political expediency (Osman, 2012:139). It is in this context that I maintain that the idea of representation is taken more seriously in the scheme of Integrated Consensual Democracy than in liberal democracy or ordinary consensual democracy. That is to say, representation is about the people and their socio-economic transformation, rather than cultivating and maintaining arcane loyalties to traditional

rulers, spiritual guides, godfathers, and kingmakers for the sake of political survival (Osman, 2012:134). As such, representation in Integrated Consensual Democracy is valued for its direct effects or outcomes, namely, the full development of the individual and the strengthening of bonds between the individual and the community. In other words, it is representation against which both the effectiveness and legitimacy of the system is gauged.

In line with the above reasoning, it can be further advanced that voting in Integrated Consensual Democratic type is an expression of awareness of the populace to connect with their socio-economic reality; they are educated and as such, able to connect their poverty and deprivation to the wrongful conduct of their sons and daughters in government (Osman, 2012:134). This is in contradistinction to representation in modern practice of liberal democracy in Africa – a situation where the populace expects handouts in order to vote and merely responds to proposed policies. It can be advanced that in voting with regard to the practice of liberal democracy, as Osman rightly points out:

The people are connected to the entire framework not just physically but spiritually. It is this spiritual linkage that makes them feel satisfied merely from the fact that one of their sons or daughters has access to power. Through this spiritual participation, when their sons or daughters have “eaten” the national cake, it is they who have eaten it. The masses don’t expect anything except handouts during campaigns (Osman, 2012:134)

It can, therefore, be argued that the concept of representation in liberal democracy is not only flagrantly opposed to substantive representation of Wiredu’s consensual democracy in which it is preceded by deliberation and active participation of the populace in formulating policies that affect their lives, but also that it is a mere expression of a need for access by the populace in times of need. Osman further contends that:

During burials or weddings, they have somebody to turn to for financial assistance. It is not accountability they want. It is access in time of need. The followers are uneducated and dissatisfied with their lot, but they are unable to draw the crucial line linking their circumstances with their primordial loyalties (Osman, 2012:134-5).

Voting in an integrated consensual democracy is, therefore, the kind that is accountability-demanding. What it shares with ordinary consensus is the simple fact that the populace are not simply reduced and used as a rubberstamp approving what is presented to them through voting with neither understanding nor prior deliberation. However, it goes a notch higher to even demand accountability on the part of the leaders. It is indeed one thing to deliberate and vote a leader into office; and another thing altogether to carry on with the deliberation process to demand accountability. This, to my mind, is what makes it a fundamental feature of African democracy in contemporary times.

Another important feature of integrated consensual democracy that is closely related to the idea of voting is multipartyism and periodic elections. Arguably, proponents of consensual democracy do not embrace elections and party politics. In fact, going by Wiredu's argument as shown earlier on in this study, there appears to be no need for political parties; and their workability is questioned on the basis that democracy by consensus in traditional Africa did not have political parties. He argues that in the scheme of consensual democracy, all participants were party to the decision making, and there was no need to oppose anything (Wiredu, 2001:238). This argument by the advocates of consensual democracy cannot pass. In fact, as Matolino rightly points out "it is anachronism to deny a place for political parties in a polity on the basis that they did not exist in the past" (Matolino, 2012:118). I am of the opinion that a contemporary democratic theory for Africa should incorporate multiparty politics and periodic elections.

To my mind, political parties provide a structure for political participation. They serve as a training ground for future political leaders. I suppose that political parties exist to primarily transform aggregated social interests into public policy. The relevance of political parties in contemporary democratic dispensation cannot be gainsaid since, in the words of Njeri Kabereri:

A political party is critical in ideological socialisation and training of leaders; indeed leaders acquire ideological discipline and conviction of values and principles within political parties. It is political parties that should keep individual leaders on the rail of good leadership (Kabereri, 2011:117).

Nevertheless, there are negative perceptions about political parties across Africa. In most cases, citizens and development partners tend to ignore political parties particularly on the grounds of them being formed along ethnic lines, and not on their relevance as far as the common good of the populace is concerned (Kabereri, 2011:117-8; 2011:124). This phenomenon is coupled with what Wiredu normally terms as sheer competition for power whereby the winner takes all power rendering the loser in a perpetual political limbo (Wiredu, 2001). In spite of such negative perceptions, which are largely true, they should not lead to blanket disregard of political parties in Africa's contemporary democratic practice. I concede that political parties still bear a mark of relevance for contemporary democratic practice in Africa.

I contend that the phenomenon of political parties, being organisations that seek to influence government policy, hold to the ideology that the good of the community should not be sacrificed on the altar of individual interest and political expediency. Political parties should sustain democratic values through constant and dynamic exchange of ideas about democratic practice as such. That is, political parties should share, for the sake of the common good, their manifestos – shared beliefs and attitudes as well as assumptions for the wellbeing of the community. In sharing manifestos, I propose that political parties should have structured dialogue guided by the principle

that all parties have the potentiality to assume power at any given time, and for the ruling party specifically that there is a regime in waiting.

As such, in integrated consensual democracy, Wiredu's party₃ actually exists. It is brought to the fore and its policy frameworks are consolidated for the pursuance of the common good. In this respect, party₃ does not in any sense whatsoever lose its identity but, rather, constructively checks the effectiveness and legitimacy of the government of the day, party₁. In sum, the shared manifestos should be implemented since this is the only sure way of testing their efficacy and responsiveness to the communal need and aspiration.

It is in view of the foregoing that periodic elections become a necessary activity in matters of social and political decision making for they guarantee the electorate an opportunity to periodically review their choices of political representation. I am persuaded to think that it is the phenomenon of periodic elections that keeps the representatives alert, to some extent, to deliver according to the needs and aspirations of the people as such.

In sum, it would be naive to think that the phenomena of political parties and elections, for that matter, can simply be wished away in the practice of democracy in Africa today. The gains that multiparty politics has achieved in Africa since the second liberation movements of the 1990s in respect to opening the democratic space are so enormous compared to a single, only one-party democracy that preceded them. To fail to incorporate multipartyism and periodic elections in a democratic theory for Africa today is to pitch the two systems of government – liberal and consensual democracy – as flagrantly opposed to each other. It should be noted that both systems share some fundamental similarities, besides the fact of them both being “democracies”. Even in consensual democracy, whenever dissenting views were recorded, they were recorded against those consenting; and this was voting by another name.

In sum, I am persuaded to argue that voting has been part and parcel of decision making in most societies of the world. What Africans did not do was to institutionalise voting as liberal democracy did. However, in a world such as ours, there is really nothing wrong with voting and its institutionalisation thereof for a meaningful democratic practice. Against this background I propose some features of integrated consensual democracy.

4.6.2 Workability of integrated consensual democracy

I have so far discussed the nature of integrated consensual democracy and what makes it a viable option for contemporary Africa. At the very least, democracy should be a process of decision-making, which involves those people who will be affected by the decisions (Sindane, 1994:2). In consequence, democracy has to be representative, accountable and participatory in order to serve the people's wellbeing for which, as I maintain, it exists. It is on this account that democracy stirs and awakens from the deepest slumber whenever the principle of accountability is asserted by members of a community or conceded by those who rule (Sklar, 1986:17-29). Thus, in contradistinction to the perception that democracy in Africa may eventually die out given the many challenges that it faces, it can be easily pointed out that insofar as the principles that define democracy as a good-in-itself are seriously taken into account, that is, equality, freedom, accountability, the common good *et cetera*, democracy is invincible.

In line with the above, integrated consensual democracy explicates the following fundamental features upon which its workability is hinged:⁵⁴

- a) Information: information means that the populace accesses and articulates accurate and relevant data necessary for political decisions.

⁵⁴ See (James Fishkin 2011).

Such data may include information about candidates lining up for positions of leadership as well as policy decisions that may affect them in the *lebenswelt* of their existence. This is where both Governmental as well as Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should take the critical step in creating awareness to the populace through civic education that corresponds to their local needs and those of national concern. Such an approach will enrich the people's deliberative power for prioritizing development projects that affect them in their daily social existence.

- b) Substantive Balance: what this means is that political positions about which projects should be prioritised and implemented in the community should be based on their supportive evidence. This supportive evidence is basically the thorough assessment of the local situation so the any project implemented squarely addresses the current, urgent and important needs of the people in their local condition of existence. The evidence should be by the people, with the people and for the people.

- c) Diversity: diversity relates to how African societies are socially and culturally constituted. It entails, as far as representation is concerned, the fact that all major political positions that are held by the public should reflect regional, religious, and gender balances, *et cetera*. It is in this respect that each segment of the populace should be more engaged and involved in the decisions that affect them socially, economically as well politically. The element of civic education should precede any decisions that are taken by the leaders that affect people in the ordinariness of their lives. I am persuaded to think that the devolved units of government in contemporary Kenya, for instance, should focus more on the people themselves prioritizing projects. This in my thinking is a plausible bottom-up approach to democratic practice, which makes Integrated Consensual Democracy a more plausible system to behold.

- d) **Consciousness:** in integrated consensual democracy, the populace has the opportunity to openly weigh all arguments in the process of political deliberation; and, above all, to hold the leaders accountable. This aspect builds on public participation, which the Constitution 2010 of Kenya so much applauds for true democratic practice. For this to have a meaningful bearing on the practice of democracy, the people themselves should be allowed to vet their representatives against their set priorities; and hold them accountable on the deliverables once they set in office.

- e) **Equality:** equality means that in a deliberative process, views are weighed based on evidence and not on who is advocating a particular view. It is the recognition of the deliberative capacity of each member pegged fundamentally on the fact that the populace “owe” to each other reasons for their respective proposals.

These features, to my mind, legitimise integrated consensual democracy rendering it responsive to the needs and aspirations of the citizens. That is, they place the worth of the individual and communal good over and above the jingoistic interest of politicians. In consequence, integrated consensual democracy qualifies as a plausible alternative democratic paradigm for contemporary Africa.

4.7 Conclusion

As I have pointed out earlier on in this study, the state in post-independence Africa has politically held too tightly to its colonial antecedent. It can be argued, therefore, that it is this phenomenon that has jeopardised the realisation of true democracy on the African continent in contemporary times. The realisation of true, meaningful and viable democracy in post-independence Africa, as I have pointed out in this chapter, is only

possible by way of eclecticism – that is, by way of a people validating their heritage, by exploring their cultural practices and incorporating those Western political values that are in line with the values that underpin democracy *sui generis*. To my mind, and as I have laboured to show, this is an important way of realising a people’s real freedom from the yoke of Western “democratic” domination.

African traditional institutions display, incontestably, a process of government that is democratic in the sense that complete participation of the people is in-built. It is on this understanding that I am persuaded to advance that African traditional institutions provided ‘participatory communality’ which rendered political relevance to the practice of democracy within a people’s cultural milieu.

Participatory communality relates to a shared communal image whereby those who are disadvantaged – the orphans and the widows as well as the less privileged members of the society - relate with other members of their community from the perspective of “social belongingness”. This is the context in which one needs to understand Amy Gutman’s concept of “identity groups” – a way in which individuals identify with others thereby affecting how they perceive their own individual interests (Gutman, 2003:2).

In this context, participatory communality offers mutual support and enhances inclusivity, which may help in combating injustices for the disadvantaged persons of the community. In fact, without inclusivity and mutual identification with each other, the practice of democracy would remain greatly undermined in contemporary Africa.

CHAPTER FIVE

FEASIBILITY OF INTEGRATED CONSENSUAL THEORY: CRITICISMS, RESPONSES AND PROSPECTS

If democracy flourishes and endures in Africa, it will not be because outsiders would like to see Africa become democratic, but will occur to the extent that African people themselves wish to tread that path.

[Rasheed Sadiq, “*Democratization Process and Popular Participation in Africa*”, 1995]

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I pointed out that there is a possibility for an alternative African concept of democracy, namely, integrated consensual theory. I argued that the establishment of such a theory is hinged on the fact that it is a conceptual error to think of a theory of democracy for contemporary Africa in a purely foreign or Western manner. As such, I pointed out that a cultural context of democracy in Africa is necessary. In this chapter, I seek to show the feasibility of such a theory by extending the argument that, even though the process of institutionalising Western democracy in Africa in its liberal context is real and substantive, it faces formidable obstacles. Consequently, for the practice of democracy to be meaningfully established – sustainable and consolidated in contemporary Africa – there is a need to interrogate its nature and establish how far it is in consonance with the political realities of traditional Africa.

Since I have already argued, too, that the theory of integrated consensual democracy in Africa can only be realised by way of validating the heritage of the African people and exploring their cultural practices, as well as incorporating those Western political values that are in line with the values that characterise democracy as a good-in-itself, I seek to critically show how the African way of life – communalism – supports this theory of democracy. As such, I will appraise a type of communalism – in-built with complete participation of the people – that supports the theory of integrated consensual democracy, the nature of party system and subsequently, the norm of political accountability. I will endeavour to do all this from the perspective that democracy remains a viable system of governance insofar as it is allowed to emerge according to a people's cultural orientation.

5.2 On the feasibility of democracy

The establishment of a more legitimate and effective democratic system of governance in any society, Africa included, can rightly be conceived to be still a 'work under construction' (Mohammed, 2002:176-7). As such, what is at stake is the whole question of the kind of democracy that is relevant for contemporary Africa. To my mind, the question about the kind of democracy that is relevant for Africa today rests on the assumption that:

Africa requires something more than the crude variety of liberal democracy that is being foisted on it, and even more than the impoverished liberal democracy that prevails in the industrialized countries. Even at its best, liberal democracy is inimical to the idea of the people having effective decisionmaking power. The essence of liberal democracy is precisely the abolition of popular power and the replacement of popular sovereignty with the rule of law (Ake, 1996:129-130).

In view of this, it can be argued that the practice of democracy in the traditional African polity, and how it can be brought to bear on the modern democratic practice in modern Africa, hinges on the important question of the relevance of democracy as a political

system of governance. The question that emerges from this concern is whether post-independence African polity requires democracy in order to respond effectively to her socio-economic and political conundrums. This concern is twofold: first, is the concern with the implicit question of democracy and not any other system of governance as a panacea of Africa's socio-economic and political maladies in contemporary times. Put differently, must democracy be – or why should it be thought to be – the plausible political system for Africa in the 21st Century? Second, and following logically from the first concern is: what form should democracy take in order for it to be meaningfully established in the post-independence era of Africa? What are the possible cultural contributions that Africa can make in order for it to be an effective and legitimate system responding to people's needs and aspirations?

To the set of questions arising from the first concern, I choose to offer a theoretical justification of democracy. With respect to the second concern, I choose to focus on what I consider to be Africa's contribution to democratic governance from a cultural perspective. Kondlo and Ejiogu strongly argue that Africa has been a victim of colonialism with no democratic values to offer but to swallow democracy – hook, line and sinker - as prescribed by the West. They assert that what this simply means is that “...many African states continue to live with the indelible marks of colonialism into the twenty-first century” (Kondlo and Ejiogu, 2011:xxii). To my mind, and in view of this argument, the kind of democracy which prevailed in Europe or any other part of the world, cannot succeed in Africa without due regard of some aspects of the African traditional culture. And so Africa's contribution to ‘democracy’ in respect to her culture cannot be gainsaid. I, therefore, choose in the course of analysis, to intermittently respond to the above concerns.

The desirability of democracy for any polity cannot be gainsaid. Arguably, it is agreed that democracy remains the most desirable system of governance of all the other systems that have been tried from time to time. It is in this respect that Iris Marion Young postulates that “We believe that democracy is the best political form for restraining rulers from the abuses of power that are their inevitable temptations” (Young, 2000:17).

In line with this view, it can be further argued that only in a democratic political system can members of a society as a cultural unit, in principle, have the opportunity to influence public policy to serve and protect their interests. In sum, as Young rightly observes, democratic process – whatever its nature – is the best means for changing conditions of injustice, on the one hand; and promoting justice on the other (Young, 2000:17).

Nevertheless, it is important to consider that even though democracy may be faced by enormous threats in Africa today, the values and ideals that are associated with it throughout the world will prevail over those threats and challenges. In my opinion, what matters is to initiate an African way of embracing democracy – by incorporating Africa's atavistic values – which will ensure, above all, that democracy remains a meaningful and viable system of governance in contemporary times.

It is important to note that the values associated with democracy – equality, justice, human rights, freedom to make one's own life choices, the desire and the right to participate in decision making on public and private issues, which affect lives, interests and communities – are eternal values that human beings worldwide cherish in both mind and heart (Pardo and Schwartz, 2007:33). It is in view of this that it can logically be argued that in most cases democracy is valued as a good-in-itself not only because it provides desirable ends, but also because its gradual acceptance relates to the idea of equality and individual liberty.

Equality entails the fact that all are the same in some important respects – that is, we share a common humanity. This is a sense of communalism which defines the African mode of life, *modus vivendi*, and which marks Africa's contribution to the world of democracy as such. What is shared must be understood to include citizenship; ability to decide what is best for oneself; a capacity for rational thought, *et cetera*. Thus, when individuals are seen as equal, at least socio-politically – and this is central to understanding African integrated consensual democracy – no person is deemed to be

any better or any worse than any other person (Catt, 1999:7). What this means is that all are seen as the same as far as rights and treatment are concerned. This is an African communal existential *modus* that proposes a criterion that illuminates a popular nature of democracy, which brings about difference in people's lives.

Against such argument, those opposed to democracy as a system of governance for Africa today may advance that most approaches to democracy in the contemporary world have apparently yielded to pseudo-democracy or simply shallow democracy without any significant difference to ordinary people. They may further advance that inasmuch as there might be radical changes in the constitution – or even expansion of political party activity as proponents of both constitutional and procedural approaches to democracy would respectively argue - unless these are accompanied by a sense of real and meaningful change in the lives of the ordinary people, especially rural dwellers, then democracy cannot be said to be meaningfully established among the people and responsive to their needs as such.

It may further be advanced that a procedural approach to democracy reduces the true meaning of democracy to mere participation in periodic elections. Democracy then simply becomes a meaningless election exercise, which leaves the electorate with invisible, incomprehensible and irrelevant leaders to their needs. It simply presents the electorate with politicians whose interest is in the vote alone – and nothing else. Baker captures this reality in a more realistic sense when he writes that:

Having candidates who come to the village before election day to fish for votes, but who return to the capital once they have been elected, this makes as little sense as keeping a spare wheel for a car 110 kilometres distance away from the car (Baker, 2000:186).

While the foregoing concerns are largely valid, and I submit that democracy requires more than merely a theatre of electoral participation. I am of the opinion that democracy requires that the people identify actual processes of popular influence on the state, which subsequently make a difference to the way the state acts (Harrison, 2002:82). This is an instance of deliberation and consensus – Africa’s offer to modern democratic practice. It is an understanding of democratic practice so imbued with the being of Africans that it entails going beyond mere periodisation, which characterises most contemporary democracies, to identifying the extent of people’s participation in the dynamics of democratic leadership.

Nevertheless, since the concern here is about explicating an African understanding of and contribution to democracy, it is to be noted that deliberation and consensus account for a model of African democracy, which emphasises the ideals of inclusivity⁵⁵ and political equality. It supports the link between democracy and justice under the ideal conditions of inclusive political equality and public reasonableness. That is, African integrated consensual democracy that this study proposes would serve as a means of discovering and validating the most just policies for the realisation of the communal wellbeing. It is a type of democracy that recognises the centrality of equity as embedded in communality. It is not a type of democracy that is confined to the ballot box, but that which recognises that the people have certain fundamental rights that do not stop at the ballot box: the right to basic health, education, security, *et cetera*. I concede that we may need to vote about such matters but the voting itself ought to be preceded by a deliberative process of what, when, where and how such fundamental rights are to be inserted among them, and the subsequent deliberative procedures meant for holding political leaders more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the populace.

⁵⁵ Since in the real world of democratic practice some people and groups have significantly greater ability to use democratic processes for their own ends while others are excluded and marginalised, there is a need for the widening of democratic inclusion to promote more just outcomes – and African democracy in its deliberative context provides important ideals for such inclusive practices.

In sum, for democracy to be feasible in contemporary Africa, it ought to be a type of democracy “in which people have the real decisionmaking power over and above the electoral consent of electoral choice” (Ake, 1996:132). Such a democracy must lay emphasis on the communal and individual identities and rights. Its feasibility further rests on fact that it must grant to Africans rights to cultural expression as well as political and economic participation. That is, it must be a democracy that leads to the recognition of nationalities, sub-nationalities, ethnic groups, and communities as social formations that express freedom and self-realisation of the Africans (Ake, 1996:132).

5.3 On communalism and political participation

I have pointed out above that the feasibility of democracy in Africa requires social transformation. Arguably, however, one of the distinct constraints that democracy still faces in contemporary Africa is that its practice does not apparently take cognizance of any cultural specificity and uniqueness of the African people. This problem can be attributed to little or no appreciation of African values and epistemic orientation in the practice of democracy, and failure to distinguish between the values and principles of democracy from particular historical practices. This is where my proposed theory of integrated consensual democracy can be said to differ radically from both ordinary consensual democracy and liberal democracy as conceived in Africa. My proposed version of democracy appreciates the recreation of democracy *sui generis* according to a people’s way of life. That is, it marries the values of democracy as a good-in-itself to the social realities of the African people.

Many African countries are ethnically heterogeneous societies and the nature of political arrangement that is feasible must be one that respects cultural diversity and gives expression to group identity and self-actualisation. As such, I have argued that for Africa to develop a genuine democracy, it must establish a type of democracy that is rooted in communalism as a way of life. In Chapter three of this study I defended communalism

as an African way of life that serves the welfare of all in the society. That is, in the communal social order, a society's benefits are more likely to be available to all the members of the society than in any other social system (Gyekye, 1995:157). This is what makes communalism a cardinal point for the establishment of integrated consensual democracy. In fact, I contended that communalism presupposes a participatory mode of existence as defined by values of social well-being, solidarity, interdependence, cooperation and reciprocal wellbeing (Gyekye, 1995:257). The critical question that is likely to emerge from this perspective is: what is the correct way of understanding communalism as a way of life that can help construct a genuine democratic practice in contemporary Africa? Besides, the argument implicit in communitarianism that the success and the meaning of an individual's life is dependent on the fact of the individual identifying himself or herself with the group raises the problem of how the whole concept of individuality is to be conceived in such a democratic dispensation.

Since I relied on the Akan social thought in arguing for the mode of communalism that supports my theory of integrated consensual democracy, I would like to point out that Gyekye himself was not oblivious to this problem either. In fact he explicitly raises it when he writes:

But inherent in the communal enterprise is the problem of contribution and distribution. The communal enterprise tends to maximize the common good because each individual is expected to contribute to it, but obviously, individuals are not equal in their capacities and talents – a fact explicitly recognized by the Akan thought [...]. It follows therefore that individual contributions to the common good will be unequal (Gyekye, 1995:157).

Gyekye observes that this manner of conceiving the individual in the communal scheme also raises another fundamental concern with regard to the distribution of the common good as such. He raises the question: "Should inequality in contribution lead to inequality in distribution?" (Gyekye, 1995:157). In other words, the main concern is

whether individuality is completely absorbed in the communal scheme, thus whittling away individual characteristics in terms of personality, initiative and responsibility.

Matolino raises similar criticisms about the communitarian scheme but with a view to establishing the proper place and conception of the individual in the African philosophical thought. Properly understood, Matolino's project is about establishing whether African communality obliterates individuality. I shall attempt to respond to this concern but I do not wish to give a full analytical exposition of Matolino's criticisms on the communitarian scheme as such. Doing so will be beyond the scope of this study. I will only point out the general criticism that Matolino puts forth as regards the place of the individual in the society, which I consider to be relevant to this project; and which can, in a sense, aid some understanding of political participation of the individual within the communal context. Besides, it is important to point out the limited nature of Matolino's criticisms of communitarianism; he does not offer criticisms that reject the doctrine of communitarianism in its entirety but only with regard to the question of personhood (Matolino, 2014:111). It is in this regard that he faults the doctrine of communitarianism in the following manner:

Thus it is correct to point out that any communitarian scheme views the individual as secondary to the realities of the community. Since the community is the primary reality the individual has to align her own reality with the primary communal reality. Failure to do so means that she has stepped out of line and she will be whipped back or worse considered a failure at the project of personhood (Matolino, 2014:113).

Matolino's concern is about what takes precedence over what in the communal scheme. From the above quotation he views as a misconception the fact that in the African communitarian scheme the reality of the community comes before that of the individual, and subsequently shapes the individual reality (Matolino, 2014:114). This could be permissible given Matolino's attention to personhood. However, since my concern in this study is about the political participation of the individual within the communal scheme, this question may not arise. I shall address myself to the question of political

participation; and argue that communalism maximises the interest of all individual members of the society.

In the foregoing respect, I wish to refer to Gyekye's concern on how an individual's contribution and distribution should be managed within the communitarian scheme. It should be noted that as far as political participation in the communitarian scheme is concerned, each individual's contribution to the common good is not equal, yet this does not mean that there should be inequality in distribution. To my mind, to argue that those who have contributed more should be entitled to more than anyone else, is to not only distort the concept of complementarity that should permeate communal existential *modus*, but also to adulterate the entire fabric of communalism – the common good.

Gyekye argues that in a communal context, distribution should not be pegged on an individual's contribution. Rather, it should be hinged on the fact that an individual's basic needs are satisfied by the society irrespective of the magnitude of his or her personal contribution. He cites the following proverbs to illustrate his point: "The left arm washes the right arm and the right arm washes the left arm" and "The fingers of the hand are not equal in length" (Gyekye, 1995:158). Implicit in these proverbs, as Gyekye argues, is the fact that people are endowed differently with natural characteristics and assets in terms of talents and capacities for which they are not responsible (Gyekye, 1995:158). In view of this, it is right and fitting to advance that from those who have naturally been given more, more should be expected. In fact, as Gyekye correctly argues, just as the power of the left arm may not measure up to the power of the right arm, nevertheless, it is able to make some meaningful and significant contribution needed by the right arm, as I suppose, and which the right arm cannot provide for itself (Gyekye, 1995:158).

In line with this argument, while there cannot be a situation of complete equality as explicated by Gyekye in the second proverb above, it can be advanced that as regards political participation, the entitlement of the individual – contribution and distribution

– to the common good, is plausible following the Akan social thought and humanistic orientation. Gyekye ably captures the relevance of each individual's contribution to and participation in the common good when he writes:

The Akan position is defensible for, irrespective of an individual's contribution to the common good, it is fair and reasonable that everyone's *basic* human needs be satisfied by the society: From each according to *whatever contribution* one can make to each according to one's *basic* needs will run the new slogan (Gyekye, 1995:158).

The way an individual participates in the political life of the community can, arguably, be likened to African familial relationship and concern for each other as conceived by Nyerere's philosophy of *Ujamaa*⁵⁶. Communalism should be appreciated as a relational bond of association and obligation necessary for political action. This is to argue that an individual cannot live a detached life from that of the community. An individual is "part of the community insofar as he/she is integrated in a complex system of authority, deference and participation" (Chabal, 2009:48).

In this regard, the significance of communalism to political participation in integrated consensual democracy is hinged on the fact that relationships go beyond any social stratification to link up the rich with the poor, the powerful with powerless, the learned with illiterate village dwellers, *et cetera* (Chabal, 2009:46). As such, African communalism affects socio-political relations in the sense that it is what defines justice and equality among the members of a society as such. It is in this respect that I opt to advance further that communalism "must be conceptualized as that part of identity which confers value, legitimacy or merit to political action" (Chabal, 2009:47).

⁵⁶ Nyerere's *Ujamaa* philosophy is anchored on traditional African values. It emphasises familyhood and communalism. It is basically supposed to embrace African cultural concepts of mutual respect; common property as well as common labour (see Nyerere, Julius. *On Socialism*, O.U.P.: Dar-es-Salaam, 1969).

In view of the foregoing, in an integrated consensual democracy, communalism is relevant in two respects. Firstly, what the concept of democracy entails is filtered through a system of values relating to the common good. I maintain that a viable and meaningful democratic practice in the post-independence period of Africa sustains the common good of which the main aspect is occupied by a communal network of obligation. If this is admissible, then my second point, following logically from it, is that the legitimacy of those in positions of leadership – political leaders – must be predicated upon their meeting the obligations for which they have responsibility within the political constituencies or associations – the community – to which they belong. This implies that even if political leaders – or members of parliament – acquire more demanding national duties, as is the case in most modern democracies, they cannot exempt themselves from the requirements and obligations of the local public good. It is in this respect that commitment to the common good will ensure that the political chasm between the leaders and the populace in contemporary democratic practice in Africa is bridged since “it is simply not possible to opt out of one’s community and continue to [politically] belong” (Chabal, 2009:50). This is a case of political communal belongingness, which is required for good democratic practice in contemporary Africa, and, which defines how and to what extent an individual should be concerned with the good of the other.

All in all, communalism plays a significant role in enhancing the sense of political communal belongingness by raising the individual’s participation in and contribution to the common good to the level of what economists would call ‘positive externality’. That is, whether rich or poor, literate or illiterate, big or small, an individual’s personal contribution – as one individual – can only afford him or her lesser benefits than when the “same” contribution is compared to the communal or societal contribution. This means that when the same individual effort is applied in collegiality with other people’s efforts, the benefits turn out to be much more for the individual, and the societal wellbeing is also realised.

5.4 On political representation and accountability

I have already pointed out that African countries are ethnically heterogeneous societies and that the kind of democracy that they require must appreciate this reality and give expression to group identity and actualisation. Nevertheless, the question that emerges with regard to the reality of heterogeneity, and which relates to political participation in contemporary Africa, is that of representation. Within such a complexity it is not possible to have direct political participation of the populace in all matters that concern the polity as would be the case in much smaller and less complicated societies. Thus, the possibility of attaining equal representation remains highly doubtful. Given this concern, I seek to argue that, with reworking of some institutions of democratic representation, my proposed theory of democracy is likely to promote a deeper sense of unity in diversity and an atmosphere of working in close proximity between the populace and the political leaders.

As I had argued earlier, it is to be noted that in most cases many of the arguments that are under the negative approach view Western democracy – or liberal democracy for that matter – as being so vast and complex in nature that the ordinary people within a polity are neither able to relate to it nor feel they have an influence upon its government. This is what has rendered the practice of Western democracy in contemporary Africa to be both ineffective and illegitimate, leading to a widening disjuncture between the rulers and the governed. In other words, ordinary citizens do not see the significance of their participation in decision-making in the practice of Western democracy. There is apathy on the side of the populace, which is not healthy for democracy at all, since it is a manifestation of the people's lack of power. That is, people's participation is limited to a mere exercise of voting after which, any other form of participation is representational – indirect – influence exercised on their behalf by the elected representatives. In consequence, decision-making is left only to a few people; and the populace can only hope to exact indirect influence through voting in an electoral system.

Dahl observes that the fact of there being vast numbers of voters in itself makes the influence exerted by any particular individual's vote miniscule. This is why he ably points out that one of the greatest problems of "the Democratic Leviathan" is that of sheer numbers – that is to say, severe upper limits are set on effective participation in "democratic" decisions by the sheer number of persons involved (Dahl, 1970:143, 145).

It is in line with the foregoing that Wiredu argues that the current forms of democracy are systems that are generally based on the majority principle as opposed to the Ashanti system that is based on consensus (Wiredu, 1996:186). He contends that such majoritarian systems cannot pass as true democracy. In keeping with the Ashanti consensual democracy Wiredu even points out that majority opinion is in itself not a good enough basis for decision-making, for it deprives the minority of the right of representation in the decision in question (Wiredu, 1996:186). He succinctly points out that this perpetual exclusion of the minority from the decision-making processes that affect their lives is responsible for political instability in contemporary Africa. He writes:

One of the persistent causes of political instability in Africa derives from the fact that in ever so many contemporary African states certain ethnic groups have found themselves in the minority both numerically and politically. Under a system of *majoritarian* democracy this means that, even with all the safeguards, they will consistently find themselves outside the corridors of power (Wiredu, 1996:188).

In view of the above argument, to my mind, the general underlying principle is that true democracy – democracy *sui generis* requires a measure of equality. This is arguably so because the effects of the phenomenon of inequality in Western 'democracies' is too widespread and too profound to warrant them to be termed true democracies at all. In this context, integrated consensual democracy advocates for institutional reform because what accounts for much of political inequality in contemporary Africa about which Wiredu is so skeptical is, to my mind, the kind of electoral system that most African states adopted, which as some scholars point out is "a first-past-the-post

electoral system” (Adejumobi and Burja, 2002:352). This kind of system promotes a winner takes all game and increases stakes in politics such that those who win, do so handsomely, and those who lose, are in fact, bad losers (Adejumobi and Burja, 2002:352). The resultant feature in such a scenario, as Adejumobi and Burja point out, is normally a tendency of marginalizing small political parties as well as the inequalities of political resources suffered by specifiable minorities – including those of material wealth that are required to influence people – since no party will be prepared to lose (Adejumobi and Burja, 2002:352).

To my mind, this is a case of disenchantment with the state that often expresses itself in the thought that those who wield the power of the state are in most cases not accountable. I argue that this can be mitigated by redesigning political institutions such that they demand accountability of those who sanction them. In this respect, I am of the opinion that a critical distinction should be made between seeing elections as a device to sanction behaviour of the incumbent political office holders, and seeing them as screening device for selecting the best candidates for such offices. This is a call for transparency, which requires responsiveness on the part of the political leader (Mehta, 2003:131). In fact as Mehta points out:

A proper discussion of accountability requires that, at a minimum, attention be paid both to formal institutional mechanisms by which sanctions can be effected and the collective action required to ensure that these sanctions are effected (Mehta, 2003:131).

In view of this, the electoral system in contemporary Africa should reflect the social realities of the people themselves. As Newman argues, parties should not exist for the sole purpose of seeking power for power’s sake but to “organize the public will and thereby bring order out of chaos of the multitude voters” (Newman, 1969:71).

If parties are organised on the grounds of public will then they may lead to greater democratisation by extending participation of the populace in decision making. It is the extension of socio-economic and political participation in the affairs of the state by the populace – participatory communality – that should become the rallying-cry of political reformers of modern Africa, and upon which the formation of political parties as vehicles of political participation should be based. This is to say, the extension of people’s participation is and should be *sine qua non*, a necessary condition for meaningful democratic practice in contemporary Africa. Political parties should have meaningful and sufficient tolerance of each other. Such tolerance may aid them in incorporating relevant policies from across the political divide for purposes of promoting the common good. This can be validated in two aspects: first, such attitude of tolerance affects the political power structure of a polity by enabling the populace to take “control” of their affairs. This means that participation goes beyond mere ‘consultation’ to a full and meaningful sharing in decision-making about matters that affect the lives of ordinary citizens. Full and meaningful sharing in decision making means that the populace can access the necessary information about which a decision is to be made and is offered a chance to deliberate on the issues that affect their lives at whatever level of their existence.

The second aspect, in which extension of participation is to be understood, is that of restructuring the political life of Africa’s modern democratic practice. It is in this context that I advocate for “association” or “community politics” (Wingo, 2004:454-5). If democracy in contemporary Africa is to be both viable and meaningful, then increasing people’s participation by means of devolving power to the communities cannot be ignored. Such an approach will ensure people’s actual sharing in the socio-economic and political activities of their communities. This is a way of appreciating communitarianism’s role in enhancing the political life of the state. In this case, participatory communality entails the fact that political power is decentralised to allow for increased and inclusive participation of the populace as much as possible.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ See Olusegun Oladipo’s article on “*Tradition and the Quest for Democracy in Africa*” (2014) at <http://them.polylog.org/2/foo-en.htm>.

In view of the foregoing, the complex political nature of Western democracy should be broken down into smaller “communal” units. This will facilitate the transfer of functions from the national level to local communities, thus ‘bringing government back to the people’, and thereby bridging the disjuncture between the rulers and the governed. This, in essence, will evoke a genuine political involvement necessary for a meaningful degree of political participation. By bringing government back to the people, the hostility of political inequality will be extinguished – or at least minimised – so as to allow the people to realise and experience both true and meaningful democracy. That is, true and meaningful democracy emerges as a government of man by man as opposed to a socially, economically and politically hostile system of Western ‘democratic’ type. As a consequence, while some governments have tried in post-independence Africa to devolve governance, for instance, South Africa and Kenya, the influence and dominance of policies that actually affect people’s lives by the central government is still very rampant. It is high time that regional governments are left, in consultation with the community “elders”, to design and implement welfare-oriented policies for their people.

In sum, what we are to make of these criticisms against Western democracy is the simple fact that the concern with sheer numbers makes the realisation of true democracy a complicated exercise. It can be argued, therefore, that while the majority’s opinion does actually affect policy in Western democracy and that the electoral process does allow for some form of political influence, such opinions of the masses are only reflections of ideological indoctrination by the political elite; and, therefore, they do not reflect the wishes of the people. This argument makes integrated consensual democracy a viable option for it prefigures ‘the rock bottom identity of interests’⁵⁸ where divergent interests – of both the minority and the majority – converge for the realisation of the common good.

⁵⁸ The argument about the rock bottom identity of interests has raised serious debate and objections. I primarily have in mind Emmanuel Eze Chukwudi’s article “*Democracy or Consensus: A response to Wiredu*” (1997), and Benard Matolino’s “*A Response to Eze’s critique of Wiredu’s Consensual Democracy*” (2009). It is not within the scope of this study to offer an in-depth response to such objections and/or responses.

Resultantly, this is why Wiredu correctly argues that “majority opinion in itself is not a good enough basis for decision-making, for it deprives the minority of the right to have their will reflected in the given decision” (Wiredu, 1996:186). It is in this connection that my earlier argument that Western democracy in its majoritarian context increases the sheer competition – struggle – for power without increasing inclusiveness should be understood. In consequence, lack of inclusiveness undermines the realisation of true democracy, and leads to pursuance of self-interest, thereby sacrificing communal ‘rock bottom identity of interests’ on the altar of political expediency.

Eze denies the existence of “the rock bottom identity of interests” of Wiredu by arguing that some members may intend to dominate others for the purposes of naked power enjoyment (Eze, 1997:318). While Eze’s argument is permissible, it is to be noted that the pursuance of such jingoistic interests cannot by any chance be the people’s wishes. I am persuaded to maintain, therefore, that the “rock bottom identity of interests” refers to the common good, which commands and directs consensus, and which is well known even by those who try to outdo and dominate others for political gains. In fact, those who try to dominate others thrive dangerously on the premise that political elites know better than the populace, and can therefore decide and dictate what is good for them, which is analytically illogical.

While I concede that what leaders think citizens will respond to normally has some bearing on their conduct (Mehta, 2003:133), what is urgently at stake is the need to redesign political institutions to provide the populace with opportunities to hold leaders more accountable. I contend that public action outside the formal confines of institutions is significant in shaping institutional behaviour. Such behaviour, if informed by the common good, will in a sense ensure that politics is not so much about factions or patronages but rather about policy implications that have a long-term impact in the society. It is in this respect that I am of the opinion that the character of the state should be institutionalised as an instrument of the common good (Mehta, 2003:134).

As such, it would be wrong to explain the “rock bottom identity of interests’ by merely wishing it away. It is important to note that self-centered interests aimed at dominating the rest for the sheer enjoyment of power are not and cannot be a reflection of genuine choices of the people. Genuine decision-making by the people entails genuine choices, which, in consequence, provide an opportunity for the advocacy and effective presentation of the divergent viewpoints to encompass the common good. This, in my view, is why Matolino correctly points out that:

The possibility and attainment of consensus lies in the process of dialogue....the dialogue is aimed at rendering bare the opposing views, understanding their content and aims; and most crucially the dialogue would be directed at building bridges between the disparate opinions (Matolino, 2009:40).

In view of the foregoing, the justification that this study advances for integrated consensual democracy is that while consensual democracy appreciates divergent views, it goes beyond the appreciation of divergent views to not only advocate but also cater for the “real” needs of the populace and to hold those in positions of political leadership more accountable to their needs and aspirations. As a result, any system which advocates for the real needs of the people but ignores their declared views must be rejected for it amounts to the same fallacy of political elites knowing better than the populace, and deciding for them. As such, citizens must appreciate and acknowledge each other in a true democracy. This explains why Mehta ably argues “A society in which citizens do not acknowledge each other is likely to be a society which cannot get the government to acknowledge them” (Mehta, 2003:139).

In consequence, while democracy poses significant difficulties with regard to representation, I have established in the course of analysis that such challenges can be surmounted by taking recourse to the traditional democratic mode of governance. This study, therefore, assumes the position that integrated consensual democracy within the

deliberative and consensual contexts, and incorporating certain elements of Western democracy that are in line with modern political demands, is the best form of government for Africa in contemporary times.

5.5 Conclusion

The cultural context of democracy tells us that, like the institutional framework, culture has been adversely ignored as if it has no role to play in the strategies for successful democratic development. I argue that while the norm has been to theoretically discount culture in the practice of democracy, it is indeed a costly error. There is a need to learn from history that “African culture has fiercely resisted and threatened every project that fails to come to terms with it, even as it is acted upon and challenged” (Ake, 1996:15). Such resistances gave rise to calls upon Africans to modernise their attitudes and culture as a way of dealing with cultural resistance; in fact, as a way to abolish the traditional culture. Nevertheless, those components of culture that can aid the practice of true democracy should be meaningfully integrated into components of Western democratic practices that contemporary socio-economic and political realities demand.

Communalism, for instance, should be a fundamental element upon which true democracy ought to be grounded in contemporary times since it does not only entail revising the concept of development, but also those of political engagements to mean collective wellbeing (Fayemi, 2009:120). In essence, communalism entails the establishment of true democracy – a pro-people type of democracy – where the populace is at the centre of economic development. As such, they would seek nothing less than their collective wellness, which entails their sharing of material and non-material benefits, mutual trust, citizenship, participation in decision making processes as well as enhanced accountability and responsiveness of the state to the general public (Fayemi, 2009:120). That is to say, in contradistinction to Western democracy, which is defined by individualism, majority rule, and autonomy of elected leaders in making decisions

for and on behalf of the citizens, communalism and other traditional African values command the democratic theory that demands commitment to communalistic spirit in social organisation and state management (Fayemi. 2009:121).

Whereas economic development is key to the practice of democracy, meaning that each democratic theory should have a correlated economic system,⁵⁹ it would be wrong for an African theory of democracy to adopt hook, line and sinker liberal democracy with its economic correlate and homology of advanced capitalism. Arguably, African democratic theory should have a balance between democratic ideals and economic requisites. It should have a mixed economic correlate that entails socialist and capitalistic orientations. In sum, African indigenous democratic institutions values and attitudes cannot be ignored if Africa is to realise true democracy that meets the demand of contemporary times.

Thus, inasmuch as Africa is democratising in the modern – or international – context, as Ake argues, in which there is apparently no allowance made for the fact that liberal democracy is a historical product (Ake, 2000:30), there should be major attempts to separate values and principles of democracy *sui generis* and liberal democracy from particular historical practices, which operationalise such values and principles in specific historical circumstances (Ake, 2000:30). The greatest task towards the feasibility of democracy in Africa rests, therefore, upon the fact of operationalising the principles and values of democracy in historical conditions that are markedly different from those of established democracies. This should be the case because as Ake rightly points out:

[...] liberal democracy is a child of industrial capitalism, a product of a socially atomized society where production and exchange are highly commodified and thus of a society which

⁵⁹ Matolino ably argues that the economy is a crucial element that determines the quality and disposition of a polity. He, however, points out that African egalitarianism has failed in this front by engaging in anachronism; that is, by simply eliminating capitalism and replacing it with those economic systems that Africans had enjoyed in their traditional set-ups (Matolino, 2012:121).

is essentially a market. It is the product of a society in which interests are so particularized that the very notion of common interest becomes problematic, hence the imperative of democratic participation (Ake, 2000:30).

If my reading of Ake is correct, then it is plausible to conclude that true practice of democracy in Africa needs to borrow a leaf from liberal democracy with some degree of caution. This is because, in contemporary Africa, primordial loyalties and pre-capitalist social structures remain very strong such that, apart from the urban enclaves, her rural societies are still constituted in communal solidarity. This, to my mind, explains why Ake finally makes the assertion that “it is communalism which defines the people’s perception of self-interest, their freedom and their location in the social whole” (Ake, 2000:31). It is for this reason that even the political party system, as I have pointed out, should be redefined to reflect Africa’s sociality since liberal democracy as practiced in contemporary Africa presupposes individualism which, I contend, is a very rare phenomenon in the communal societies of rural Africa. The feasibility of democracy in contemporary Africa must, therefore, be rightly conceived as a project of historical significance.

As far as accountability is concerned, there should be a reworking of government institutions so that governmental structures enable routine interaction between the leaders and the populace. I have argued that this is possible if actual power is devolved to political associations or to community politics – grassroots. This, to my mind, will enable the citizens to observe individual characteristics of their leaders. As such, in a true democratic practice, accountability acts as a stimulant for public interest, for as Nyasani argues, it assumes a peculiar characteristic of throwing open the floodgates to an atmosphere of transparency (Nyasani, 2010:250). Arguably, therefore, if the citizens act communally in the sense that they are inspired by their commitment to the common good, then it is very possible that accountability will result in a more effective and legitimate democratic governance in contemporary Africa. It is in view of this that Nyasani writes:

Accountability therefore is the first and inevitable step towards the prevention and elimination of corruptive practices in any society. Accountability very effectively undermines, countermands and blinds human instinct towards mischief by setting a robust standard of lawful behaviour founded upon the principles of personal discipline and public morality (Nyasani, 2010:250-1).

In sum, my reading of Nyasani is that the feasibility of democracy in Africa requires values of commitment to the common good as well as self-discipline on the part of the leaders to be responsive to people's needs and aspirations about which contemporary Africa is so incredulous.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It requires no great leap in imagination to understand that Africa's extreme problems require – dare I say – extreme solutions. There are times in history when change becomes imperative and nothing less than a revolution in attitudes will suffice. Such a time is now. The reconstruction of a new African leadership is set on the agenda of history.

[Kofi Buenor Hadjor, *On transforming Africa: Discourse with African Leaders*, 1987]

6.1 Introduction

This study sought to investigate the institutional failure of democracy to function properly in post-colonial Africa, at least according to the formally established procedures. This was informed by the fact that most political regimes in post-colonial Africa have consistently claimed to be “democratic”; and yet their rule has been largely characterised by political authoritarianism, illegitimate seizure of power, massive corruption, assassinations, escalating insecurity, *et cetera*. In view of this, it was noted that what has now become the norm of democratic practice in Africa is largely indicative of the lack of consonance and congruence of Western democracy with African political values and attitudes. In effect, the current “democratic norm” can hardly be said to derive from African traditions.

In view of the foregoing, failure of democracy in Africa is largely characterised by the fact that the practice of Western democracy failed to generate sentiments of personal commitment to the state, which is diametrically opposed to African humanism. Thus, the extent to which Western democracy satisfies the basic fundamental functions of a

government – effectiveness - and the capacity to engender and maintain the belief that it is the most appropriate political institution for contemporary Africa – legitimacy - were critically analysed. It was underscored that the history of the emergence of democracy in Europe, and its subsequent establishment outside Europe, are responsible for democracy's apparent illegitimacy and ineffectiveness on the African continent in modern times.

Historically, European democracy emerged from moments in the revolutions of the 1840s when new regimes temporarily installed both representative legislatures and general male suffrage with authoritarian regimes taking over and sapping legislative power (Tilly, 2004:214). In consequence, European democracy ranged from authoritarian government – high governmental capacity combined with little protected consultations to fragmented tyranny (Tilly, 2004: 214, 27). Outside Europe, as David Albernethy argues, European democratization was carried out through colonisation, conquest, confrontation and revolution that promoted both democracy and tyranny (Albernethy, 2000:55-60). In view of this, it can rightly be inferred that the establishment of Western democracy in contemporary Africa was wrapped within the history of European violent colonisation under the guise of the mission to politically civilise Africa⁶⁰. As a result of this it has yielded to authoritarianism without any meaningful outlets for political expression which characterised colonial rule.

In view of the foregoing historical development of European democracy, it is argued that the emerging problem of democratic practice in post-independence Africa is informed by such history and experience, which support the colonial mission by the universal claim that only European or Western democracy can yield better political governance. Contrary to the view that only Western democracy can effectively address Africa's socio-economic and political conundrums, the study concluded that any effort by "foreign" or external governments, institutions, and agencies to direct political and economic changes in Africa is bound to fail insofar as it denies the natives – the peoples

⁶⁰ See (Monica Flores, 2005)

of Africa and their representatives – the right to determine their own destiny⁶¹. This explains why Gyekye rightly points out that “political institutions that were bequeathed to the African people by colonial rulers...modeled on those colonial rulers, did not function properly (Gyekye, 1997:115).

In the same vein, Africa’s dependence on European political paradigms can be said to have hugely affected the performance of democratic governance in Africa, and especially the concepts of consent, efficiency and political legitimacy. This is further compounded by the fundamental problem of disjuncture between the state and the society; and between the political class and the ordinary people, which manifests itself in alienation, disempowerment and low sense of ownership of the state by the masses as has been pointed out. As a result of this, failed states that cannot guarantee democracy, good governance and efficient service delivery to the people abound in post-colonial Africa.

In order to philosophically establish the reasons that account for the fundamental problem that democracy faces in contemporary Africa as outlined above, the study stipulated the following four objectives:

- i) To philosophically appraise the practice of democracy in Africa;
- ii) To investigate the philosophical basis of traditional African democratic polities;
- iii) To examine democratic features in Africa’s indigenous government and explore ways in which they can benefit contemporary democratic practice;
- iv) To investigate whether Western notions of democracy are well-suited for African polities

⁶¹ See Samuel Makinda’s article on “Reclaiming Democracy for Africa: Alarming Signs of Post-Democratic Governance (2003).

In line with the set objectives, the study analytically sought to establish the extent to which African traditional democratic principles can possibly contribute to the enhancement of democratic polities in contemporary Africa. It is in view of this central concern that the study addressed the following specific yet critical questions:

- i) What are the philosophical concerns about democracy in Africa?
- ii) What is culture and its significance within African philosophical debates around democracy?
- iii) Can a viable political structure be forged on Africa's own tradition and political rule?
- iv) In what ways can the traditional system of government benefit the current democratic practice in Africa?

It is on the basis of the set objectives alongside the study questions that the conclusions and recommendations for further research were drawn. Nevertheless, the study in the overall analysis established that African traditional democratic principles, institutions, values and attitudes can contribute to the enhancement of democratic polities in contemporary Africa; and ensure that the practices of popular authorization and consensus are entrenched in the exercise of power, thus producing a model of democratic governance that the populace can freely accept. Against this backdrop, I present thematically the summary, findings and recommendations of the study.

6.2 Illegitimacy and ineffectiveness of democracy in Africa

In the course of philosophical analysis, this study delved into the fundamental problem of the failure of democracy to function properly as hinged on the illegitimacy and ineffectiveness of Western democracy in post-independence Africa. It pointed out that Western democracy is an illegitimate colonial construct. Its illegitimacy is epitomised in the disjuncture between the state and the society; and between the political class and

the ordinary people. It manifests itself in alienation, disempowerment and low sense of ownership of the state by the masses. This renders the state invisible to the lives of its citizens to the point where it appears to abrogate its constitutional responsibilities through its sheer incapacity to act on its citizens' behalf.

The logic of argumentation here is that viable and meaningful democracy emerges according to the specifics of a community and is related to political power emanating from the community itself. Since power, it is argued, is inherent in the community, it requires no justification. Rather, what it requires is legitimacy. Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert – but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than the actions that follow. The question that challenges the legitimacy of Western democracy in Africa borders around the issue of justification of government. It can simply be put thus: Is a justified government *ipso facto* legitimate?

When political legitimacy is challenged, on the one hand, it bases itself on an appeal to the past since it emanates from the initial getting together of a people to guarantee power to the government. On the other hand, when the justification of a government is challenged, it relates to an end in the future – what it hopes to achieve. A justified government is, therefore, not necessarily legitimate just as violence can be justifiable but can never be legitimate. Justification may follow the legal procedure such as majority voting-in a government but all it leads to is the exhibition of an 'empty chimera', that is, a non-conservative attitude and haplology that power is power.⁶² In this line of thought, legitimacy and effectiveness of democracy should not follow the path of arbitrary power. Instead, they should be defined by two fundamentals: first, the degree of governmental capacity and second, the extent of protected consultations to build consensus on governmental matters. These two factors intensely affect democracy as they reinforce each other for purposes of effectiveness and legitimacy (Tilly, 2004:7).

⁶² See (Hans Reiss, 1970:103, 113-4).

Nevertheless, Africa's postcolonial democratic practice follows the features of colonial politics – state power and arbitrariness. The colonial situation is likened to the Hobbesian pre-political state in which all claims are arbitrary and all rights are only powers. Since the colonial state was an arbitrary power it failed to engender any legitimacy (Ake, 1996:3). Without legitimacy, democracy is deprived of the capacity to resolve any disagreements that may arise in a polity with regard to the question of political equality and justice as such.

It is legitimacy that makes democracy a viable way of resolving disagreements while remaining faithful to public equality. In this sense, democracy leads to justice, which the populace requires in political governance. In the practice of Western democracy, legitimacy presupposes that political authority in a modern society must involve a democratic decision-making process. That is, the democratic decision-making process is the only public way of achieving equality of advancement of interests among the populace. What this signifies is that there is a tighter connection between legitimacy of political authority and its democratic pedigree.

Western democracy holds that democratic legitimacy requires that political disagreements be resolved through a democratically legitimate decision-making process; and that each individual ought to be respected as a separate moral agent with his/her own sense of justice. Now, if democratic legitimacy requires that political disagreement be resolved through a democratically decision-making process, and that it must instantiate this as a fundamental democratic value, then legitimacy is unfortunately rendered a matter of democratic procedure, which is tantamount to establishing legitimacy on the convenience of majoritarianism.

It is argued that it is wrong to determine democratic legitimacy on the basis of the majoritarian principle upon which Western democracy thrives. Majoritarianism cannot be juxtaposed with consensus since the value of democracy is that everyone be respected as a separate moral agent with his/her own sense of justice. If an entire segment of a

population, for instance, is being oppressed and exploited in the resolution of political disagreements, by fact of ‘majority decides’ or ‘tyranny of numbers’, then, even if the process used is ‘procedurally democratic’, the resulting decision cannot be genuinely democratic – or legitimate for that matter – given that an entire segment of the population is not being offered the equal respect to which it is entitled (Kassner, 2006:485).

To be democratically legitimate and engender respect for its directives, a decision-making process requires more than democratic procedures. The values of democracy and the rights to which such values give rise must be respected and protected. Otherwise, the procedure becomes a mere pretext for undemocratic rule. Besides, there is an additional requirement for democratic legitimacy which goes beyond the normative adequacy. That is to say, in order for a state to rightly demand recognition of its legitimacy, it is not enough that its practices, ideals, and institutions at the present time only satisfy criteria of justice; it is also necessary that it answers to the injustice of the procedures through which it incorporated cultural groups within its boundaries (Valadez, 2001:9).

In conclusion, democratic legitimacy is not just a matter of periodic elections and majoritarian endorsement. It requires a feeling of belongingness instantiated in the life of the populace, which guarantees consultation and taking part in the decisions that affect them in the ordinariness of their life – their life world, *lebenswelt*. In order to appropriately understand political legitimacy, it is not enough that a government provides resources and builds roads – for these are mere functions of government. We must go beyond functions of government with its respective capabilities, and consider the motivation for political participation and engagement.

Against the foregoing, democratic practice in Africa can flourish in a cultural milieu if, and only if, the populace exhibits willingness to understand the perspectives and needs of others, and sense of solidarity (Valadez, 2001:1, 9). Since effectiveness of democracy

may also be undermined by a decline in civic character of social trust, the citizens should be allowed an enabling environment, which will address the challenge of developing and maintaining a civic virtue and solidarity. In essence, the communal or even consensual relationships within a democracy should not be through hierarchical relations of dependence and authority, as is currently experienced in Western democracies, but through interactions in which their status as equal fellow citizens is recognized and appreciated. This leads to a consensual way of practicing democracy where individuals learn to take the needs and interests of others into account and moderate their views accordingly.⁶³ Members of a political community in contemporary African polity should be given an enabling environment at the grassroots level to fully participate in discussions and critical examination of collectively binding public policies with commitment to the common good as the guiding principle and the greatest good, *summum bonum*, of life.

Since civic character and social trust form the common launching pad of democratic effectiveness, further research should seek to establish the commitment of African governments to the enhancement of civic virtue and communal solidarity given the phenomenon of rampant civil strife and ethnic conflicts on the continent.

6.3 African communalism

In the previous sections of this study, I strongly argued that for democracy to be meaningfully established in contemporary Africa, it should be hinged on political communal existence, which in effect relates to the equality within a polity. I have particularly pointed out that equality is possible because of the communal wellbeing, which is shared by all “regardless” of an individual’s own status or contribution. This, as I pointed out, should not be misconstrued to mean that the study advocates for a purely constituted consensual democracy. Rather, I submit that there is an imminent problem of understanding democracy in purely consensual manner since in such a

⁶³ See Valadez’s argument on the same (2001:20).

democracy, the “voice of the individual is lost” and that there is a possibility of ‘mass man-ship’ in decision making. I contend that, contrary to such a view, true democracy must be at once practical and also respond to people’s needs in their ordinariness of life. It must affirm and not deny the legitimate moral claim of the individual nor have their status slighted.

In consequence, it can be concluded that democracy *sui generis* denotes that form of government in which the ruling power of the state is vested not in any particular class or classes, but in members of the community as a whole. It is, thus, essentially a matter of political method. In this regard, democracy is not a particular kind of civilization, but a civilized way of political action. As such, far from conceiving democracy in a purely consensual manner, I advanced that democracy should be a political system that enables the populace to live together for the pursuance of the common good. I pointed out that it is the communalistic living that can enable Africans to determine the course of political leadership that may pass as true democracy in the post-independence era. In sum, the kind of political aspirations required of democracy are only possible under a communal *modus vivendi*.

It is in the same vein that I argued that within a communal set-up, individuals inhabit the world where they feel to a greater extent at home. In such a situation, I argued that the moral status of the person is acknowledged; it is a world in which an individual’s freedom is enabled to serve not only his or her personal interest, but also those of others. This is what this study termed the political communal belongingness. In such a world of political communal existence, the modes of interaction define people’s appreciation of civic friendship. As such, they relate with each other “not as competitors but in a relationship of reciprocal recognition and mutual respect” (Mehta, 2003:37). Besides, it was argued that pre-colonial African life was of a quotidian type with built-in practical and moral virtues education. As a result of this, political institutions were constructed around the moral value track of communal existential *modus*. It is in this context, as Ajume Wingo postulates, that social and political institutions were arranged so as to render the desired collective outcome – the common good (Wingo, 2001:157).

In consequence, in unravelling the relevance of communal life to the practice of democracy in post-independence Africa, the study addressed how pre-colonial African political arrangements and processes enabled people to deliberate and deal with rather vexing and divisive issues that raise complex questions with regard to what is just, what is fair, and what is good for the entire society. I argued that figuring out what was publicly regarded as good, fair and just was what was in the common interest of the community, and what the African public palaver was all about. The purpose for which people engaged in lengthy discussions at any level of their communal existence was to achieve nothing else other than the common good.

In the foregoing respect, the community serves as the only place where, when people's interests clashed, they talked for hours and hours to arrive at a consensual agreement (Wingo, 2001:156). In this consensual context, however, the role of discussion has the obvious affinities of appreciation by individuals of the viewpoints of other individuals and the community as a whole. It is against this backdrop that the study underscored that the African concept of community can help to animate both the theory and practice of democracy in Africa's post-independence era.

In the article "*Society and Democracy in Africa*" Wiredu argues that a communal sense of belonging was so strong in the traditional African society that people were concerned about each other. This was basically so because the individual identities were so nested within the fabric of the community. He writes:

So strong, in fact, is the sense of communal belonging in the traditional setting that an individual's very sense of self is contextualized not only to the fact of community but also to its values; so that a person, for all concerned, is not just an individual born of human parentage, but also an individual of that description whose settled habits evince sensitivity to the basic values of the community (Wiredu, 2001:172).

This is to say – as far as communalistic *ethos* is concerned – that it is imperative that the individual adjusts his or her interests to the interest of others. To this end, communalism could help in solving the rampant problem of corruption and the use of state resources for personal gain and enrichment by the political leadership. As Wiredu notes, it is in this context that the communalistic culture is compatible and analogous to the principles of the golden rule of doing to others what one would expect others to do unto him or her. That is, individuals in such a culture are enjoined to think about their contribution to the society, and not so much what gain they can obtain from the society (Wiredu, 2001:173). To my mind, Wiredu is making an ethical claim for the constraint and restraint on arbitrary use of power by those in positions of leadership.

In line with the foregoing, the study advanced arguments that pertain to the concept of political participation. I pointed out that participation does not arise at the individual level only. As a matter of fact, individuals are conceived to benefit from participation, since there are benefits which accrue to the community; and which can only be obtained when one connects to and participates in the life of others – the community. In other words, it was argued that it is participation that links the individual with the community; and because the individual is involved in the governing of community, he or she identifies with it and comes to appreciate the claims of other individuals and of the community as a whole. Besides, since in a community every individual is respected for the simple fact that he or she is, the common man will have a chance to meaningfully contribute to the way the society is governed. It is in this respect that the study pointed out that integrated consensual democracy allows the opinions of everyone, including those of the common man, to prevail. That is, in integrated consensual democracy, citizens relate with each other not as competitors but rather by looking upon each other in the way of complementarity. That is, it is only in their sociality that the populace constitutes the fulfillment of democratic aspirations (Mehta, 2003:37). Thus, in a communitarian scheme, individuals inhabit a social world where they can genuinely claim control over the political circumstances of their lives. It is argued, therefore that it is in the communal context that democracy can be said to be both viable and meaningful in contemporary Africa.

Nevertheless, while I submit that there is a sense in which popular authorisation and elections may have degraded the exercise of power in contemporary Africa, further research should establish why even with communal solidarity that is still so widespread in rural societies of Africa, contemporary Africa is still far from producing the modes of governance that the populace can freely accept.

6.4 In retrospect: Conclusion

At independence, Africans looked to the future with hope and confidence. “The burning desire for change”, so Kofi Hadjor observes, “which swept the continent led to a flowering of new ideas and eventually forced the old colonial masters to make exit” (Hadjor, 1987:1). However, instead of Africa being in its rightful global place, the failures of today have proven the contrary. The democratic practice in Africa in modern times is worrying for it does not exhibit a sense of independence that Africans hoped they achieved. Democratic experience in contemporary Africa exhibits the bare fact that there are undoubtedly two worlds: one real and the other possible. It is taken that the ‘real’ world of democracy exists “out there”. It is a world of established and flourishing democracies in which Africa is an unfortunate outsider. Africa can and should only strive to join this world – a world, anxious and with potentiality to play midwife to the birth of democracy in Africa.

Jonathan Hyslop commenting on Africa’s reality in mid1990s observes that:

While South Africa has produced a viable and vibrant set of democratic institutions, the encounter with the grim realities of post-apartheid society has led to an almost inevitable disillusionment. Democratisation in Zambia and Malawi has produced disappointing results. Nigeria’s escape from dictatorship is still in the balance. Moi’s oligarchy hangs on in Kenya. Mugabe’s rule in Zimbabwe is increasingly ossified. Eritrea and Ethiopia are in conflict despite their common achievement against appalling dictatorship. The military configuration in Zaire, which threatens to draw in the whole of

central African region, may seem to point to an increasingly militarised continent (Hyslop, 1999:ix).

While some of these realities that Hyslop underscores may have certainly changed in terms of those at the helm of political power and leadership, as in the case of Kenya that has so far had two other regimes from the time President Daniel arap Moi relinquished power in 2002, there could be a possibility that Africa's underlying socio-political and economic challenges in the post-colonial period remain the same. This may explain why Hyslop is quick to conclude that "... advances to democracy in Africa will involve battles stretching over many years, rather than quick fixes" (Hyslop, 1999:ix). Against this backdrop lies the fact that in post-independence Africa, socio-economic and political challenges require African solutions as a way forward for the continent. This necessitates the mobilisation and deployment of positive aspects of African traditional culture into the democratic practice. Joseph Nyasani alludes to such a necessity when he writes that:

Part of the problem...may very well have to do with human inability to discover, appraise and adopt positive values across cultures and, indeed know how to integrate them for the common exploitation in a spontaneous and humanistic manner (Nyasani, 2010:291).

In view of this, the study has provided an analysis of listing and explaining Africa's democratic failure in the context of African cultural values. The study has pointed out that culture is Africa's arsenal of the axiological, aesthetical and moral values required for addressing democratic challenges in the post-independence era of Africa. Thus, the challenge for philosophers and those who wield the political and economic destiny of Africa, as Nyasani points out, is to robustly articulate these values in order to make contemporary times for Africa a time of:

...reassertion, re-adaptation and, indeed, self-reaffirmation having emerged from the ignominious state of political, mental, spiritual and material torture and deprivation brought about by circumstances well outside Africa's control (Nyasani, 2010:295).

In view of the foregoing, conceptual analysis employed by this study helped to explain why contemporary democratic practice in Africa has failed both in its effectiveness and legitimacy; and why there are so many variations and ambiguous effects in its rule. Notably, the study underscored the fact that African traditional political values and practices ought to shape the actual configuration of political democracy. African social and cultural determinant – communalism – is necessary for the realisation of the common good; and, as such, should be the pivotal point for the establishment of a viable and meaningful democracy in Africa in the post-independence era.

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