The Contrasting Images of Democracy in Philosophy and History: Lessons for African Nation States

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Abstract:
The Western styled democratic experience to put it mildly, has been a tragedy in Africa. In so many countries the democratic electioneering process has always been a near war experience. The process of elections is marred and end in violence. The political gladiators called political parties never agree both in the process and the end result. Africa is full of sit-tight rulers who use every hook and crook to keep themselves in power using the so-called democratic process as a smokes-screen. Many diagnosis and prognosis have been given as to the cause of the failure of the western-styled democratic system in African. It is the position of this paper that the democratic debacle in Africa is due to the fact that Africans are importing a system which many Africans do not understand nor have they developed the appropriate political culture and behavior for it because we are practicing a democratic system that is not adapted to the peoples political understanding nor to their cultural sensitivities. The democratic political system is not a one-size-fit-all, hence the need to allow democracy to find its African face.

Keywords: Democratic values, elections, liberal democracy, totalitarian democracy, rule of law, political adaptation

1. Introduction
The fundamental problem which has confronted political philosophers from antiquity to the present time is to articulate the best manner in which society and political life should be organized in order to remove conflict as much as possible. Occasionally it has been the question of the legitimacy of the exercise of power; at other times it is that of the right of citizenship. Sometimes it has been the problem of determining whether society and its demands are due to the contrivance of man, at other times is the attempt to find out whether there are atemporal and ahistorical truths which must govern individuals in society, which only the Platonic-type philosopher king could discover and to be dictated to men.

However, an analysis of all human societies will indicate, as Goetz Briefs has observed that all ‘human society, has a constitution, which determines who belongs to the society in question; how far its competence reaches, to what ends it is established, how the will of such society is to be formed and executed’.

It was the many attempts to solve these problems that gave birth both theoretically and practically to the many forms and systems of government that operated at one time or the other and at various places in human history. And so when a Plato, an Aristotle, an Aquinas, a Montesquieu, a Rousseau, a Marx, an ‘Oji ofo’ recognised one form of government or the other like, Monarchy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy, or ‘Ohacracy’ (government by the generality of the people), they were merely recognising the many ways in which men had tried to meet up the demands of living together in society, that is: trying to articulate, regulate and organise their social and political life.

Philosophers and political theorists had occasionally shown their preference, or admiration for one system or the other depending on the reference point of one’s analysis; whether in the light of efficacity or morality; economy or pragmatism; the right of the individual or the society; the rule or the ruled etc. Analysts of social (political) constitutions have identified three elements in any such constitution written or unwritten: namely: The Demos element: representing the generality of peoples under the constitution; The Aristoi element: referring to those wielding the technique of government; And the Archon element: representing the rules in a place. It is in the measure in which any of the elements predominate at any particular time that a particular form of government prevails.

A form of government which seemed to have outlived the others both in popularity, geographical spread, and in intellectual acceptance, will occupy us in this article. I mean, Democracy.

1.1. The Idea of Democracy
Democracy is both a socio-political arrangement and a political theory in which the Demos(people) element seemed to be more predominant. At least from the etymological point of view, it can be traced to two Greeks words Demos (people) and Kratein (to rule) hence the people’s rule. Thus, a demology seem to precede the philosophy of democracy. This is why Lesile Lipson said ‘wherever the democratic revolution succeeded; it was aimed at those Oligarchies, at the
power they wielded and the privileges they enjoyed, at their pretentions of superiority over the common man. Democracy affirmed its faith in the inherent worth of every individual and strove for a political order in which all could live with measure of dignity. In spite of this emphasis on the people’s rule, what this amounts to in concrete practice, and even its theoretical articulation has not always been very easy to ascertain, hence its various manifestations in history.

Right from the early days of ancient Athens when the people assembled at the Agora(public square) and participated directly in the political process through speech and action, passing by the 18th century liberalism when it was partly eclipsed; reaching to the French revolution when it became the symbol of the people's power and eventually it's classical definition in the hand of Lincoln in his Gettysburg address of November 19th 1863, as ‘government of the people by the people’, the essence of democracy and what it entails has not received an undisputed consensus.

It is this lack of agreement on essentials that has made at times diametrically opposed governments to reclaim democracy. Contradictory polices are at times adopted or executed in the name of democracy. For example, the liberal governments of the West, the former Soviet Communist State, the Communist government of the people's Republic of China, the fascist state under Musolini, Nazism under Hitler, some of the one-party African states, all claim the heritage of democracy. Why all these confusions one may ask? Is the ambiguity not in the concept of Democracy itself? I think that the problem is not unconnected with the age long problem and tension since Plato between the demands of what is to be thought, and what is to be done; between the speculative thought and political conduct or statecraft-hence between theory and praxis; between contemplation and action; the ideal and the real. It is doubtful if there is any modern political theory which does not preach democracy, the problem lies in the attempt to give our ideas flesh, in the practical realization of our ideals.

Consequently, in the philosophical analysis of democracy we are above the problematic concern of empirical political regimes, for democracy as practised never exists in a pure state, it manifests itself in reality as approximations, and cannot fully be identified with any concrete regime just like love, sadness, happiness. However, it is probable that certain regimes approximate the ideal more than others.

As we are considering the changing images of democracy, in this write-up, our enquiry takes cognizance of the ideal and the manifestations in history, in order to see the forms which democracy has taken at different strategic moments in history and, the elements and values which the various moments seemed to propagate, and the part which ideologies have played in determining the image. Let us consider then the images of Democracy in the ancient, Greek and modern moments.

2. The Greek Moment: Direct Democracy

Political theory seemed to trace the first manifestation of democracy to the ancient Greeks. This is why Betrand de Jouvenel said that whoever wants to pay homage to the founders of political theory should take a voyage to Athens. The Greek city states except Sparta seemed to have experienced a development from Monarch to Aristocracy; from Aristocracy to Tyranny, from Tyranny to Democracy. Democracy seemed to be a philosophic answer of the many in contesting the power of the few: the Aristocracy whose title of ruler-ship has been based principally on their right to property and birth. Democracy in the ancient city states seemed to be manifested in the right of all free men to come to the Agora and participate through speech and action in determining the life of the city. This right is based on two forms of equality which distinguished the Greek societies from that of their neighbours namely: the isonomia(equality of citizens) before the law, and the Isegoria(equal liberty of opinion and expression of opinion) in public. This great Athenian Democracy, is not far from the traditional assembly of the elders and mature adults in the Igbo traditional society of Nigeria which some refer today as Ohacracy, (from oha na eze meaning the Assembly of the high and the low).

However, this Athenian democracy has its limitation. It excluded slaves, and women, and peasants because of its fear for excesses and anarchy, for it despised all parties and factions. Hence there is no place for oppositions in the city; no positive role is given to it but stamped with ostracism. Whereas the individual was somehow respected yet the notion of the individual was not prominent nor his right as such. He did not endeavor to assert his right over the whole. Secure in his social value he needs not trouble about his individual person.3

However, rule of law proponents. Plato and Aristotle at one time measured Democracy by numerical criteria, as the rule of the many. However, for Plato and Aristotle, democracy was not their government of preference, they feared that the government of the people will necessarily breed anarchy or tyranny of the mob. Plato in the Republic declared: ‘Democracy comes into being when the poor wins, killing some of the others and casting out some….’ For Aristotle, the real difference between Democracy and Oligarchy is poverty and wealthy, where poverty rules that is Democracy. For Cicero, ‘The absolute power of the people degenerates into the mob’. Most of the early thinkers called for mixed government, limited participation, while the power rest under the monarchy or aristocracy as the need may be.

3. The Modern Moment: Liberalism and Democracy

We have been used to the name Liberal democracy, that we tend to think that the terms ‘liberalism’ and ‘democracy’ had always had a natural co-existence. This is however not true. It is very little known that liberalism and democracy had had uneasy and at times confrontational co-existence and many libertarians even till today consider democracy as a menace. For as Held said; ‘The complex relationship between liberalism and democracy is brought out
clearly in this confrontation which reminds one forcefully that the democratic component of liberal democracy was only realized after extensive conflict, and remains a rather fragile achievement.\(^6\)

If this uneasy co-habitation is not well known; it is because it has co-existed in the modern social political order in the Western world.

The difference between liberalism and Democracy at the beginning is best brought out by Hayek’s statement that Liberalism and democracy, although compatible are not the same. He observed that the difference is best seen if we consider their opposites. The opposite of Liberalism is Totalitarianism while the opposite of Democracy is Authoritarianism. In consequence, ‘it is at least possible in principle that a democratic government may be totalitarian and that an authoritarian government may act on liberal principles’.\(^7\)

Liberalism in its original sense is simply the tradition of modernity in the Western world – the liberal civilization. It could be said to be a new spirit, a new attitude, a new vision of man and the world brought about, by an unplanned process dating back to the Renaissance and Reformation with implications which are intellectual, scientific, philosophical, cultural, and socio-political.

This liberal tradition is hinged on the phenomenon of freedom – the quest for freedom, and reign of freedom; freedom of speech, freedom of initiative, freedom of economic activity. It extols the dignity of the human person and the need for everyone to be treated as an end not as a means. The freedom of free association was advocated. Of course the liberal freedoms do not solve all problems; there remains the problem of the type of state that will take care of these freedoms; there remains the relationship between free men in society; there remains the problem of freedom and equality; there remains the questions of legitimating authority and the limit of their power; the relationship between the individual and society.

It is in trying to resolve these questions that the conflict will emerge between a certain understanding of democracy and a certain understanding of liberalism. Does Democracy as the will of the people; or the will of the majority, the people’s power square up with Liberalism as the promotion of individual freedom. How could they co-exist?

This will be the cause of the breakup of the liberal family that had remained till today, leading to the different conceptions of democracy itself. And the confusions in the use of the word ‘Liberalism’ today stem from this source. A liberal today means one thing for the Anglo-Saxon world (United States of America and Great Britain) and another for the Continental Europe. The difference between the Democratic party and the Conservative party in the United States, even though they claim the same liberal tradition comes from this same confusion. So also, the Labour and Conservative party in Britain.

It is the attempt to supply answers to the above questions and clear the confusion that led to many philosophical reflections of the 18\(^{th}\) century. Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, and Montesquieu in France; Locke, Hume and Adam Smith in Britain; Jefferson and Paine in America; Lessing and Kant in Germany.\(^8\) Their reflection will also provide philosophical basis to the two forms of liberalism and liberal democracies that would emerge, namely; Libertarian Democracy which claim to represent the old orientation of liberalism, and a certain understanding of liberalism and democracy, and liberal Democracy that claim to marry the ‘people element’ of democracy and individual freedom. Some contemporary proponents of libertarian democracy also call it legal democracy or Market democracy, while referring to liberal Democracy as Social Democracy.

4. Libertarian Democracy (Legal Democracy)

The proponents claim to defend original liberalism based on the defence of individual freedom, and they call for a democracy that is compatible with the defence of individual freedom. Generally, their understanding of freedom is that of negative freedom i.e. the absence of coercion.

The main role of the state is to uphold the liberty and security of all citizens, and equality before the law. Economic freedom seems to be determinant in this democracy, hence it is a sort of democratic basis of capitalism. The ideas of Locke and Adam Smith and Montesquieu were very influential. For these people society should be envisioned more like a market, a place of exchange in which individuals have to operate without coercion following agreed rules and accepting ones fate from the outcome whether profit or loss.

Seen in the Lockean perspective, Libertarian democracy believes that individuals possess natural rights, and identified self-interest as most powerful drive in man. The state or government originate not from the political nature of man but from the need for individuals to establish institutional means of protecting their rights and assuring the peaceful flow of the diversity of their social activities. The state is to provide security and protection of man’s natural rights: Liberty life and estate. No positive power is legitimate without the consent of the governed.\(^9\)

In Adam Smith, the economic activity of individuals engaged in free competition and the pursuit of self interest became the heart and raison d’etre of society. We recall here the words of Adam-Smith about self interest as the basis of action. He said “it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, the baker, that we expect our dinner but to their self regard to their own interest, we address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self love”.\(^10\) Thus, the good of the libertarian democracy is mainly to offer people the means of protecting their freedom, by the ability of citizens to replace one government by another and hence to protect themselves from the political decision-makers, transforming themselves into an immovable force.

It accepts the idea of democracy as abiding by the will of the majority in accordance with the rule of law, and not any arbitrary will of the majority. That is, the law should be general, universal, certain and impartial which does not aim at achieving a particular good. Libertarian democracy defends old time minimalist state, and old-time capitalism.

For Hayek, Liberalism is a doctrine about what the law ought to be. Democracy about the manner of determining what will be the law.\(^11\) And of course in order to arrive at such many philosophers like Locke, Montesquieu, etc., opted for the
separation of powers of the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary. Libertarians continue to feel uneasy about the idea of Democracy as ‘Will of people’, because they fear that such could destroy the freedom of individuals or the state intervening to foist on the people decisions in the name of the common Good. Modern defenders of Libertarian democracy include: Friedman M, Hayek and Noziek;12 the Conservative parties in Britain and United States of America. Libertarian democracy defends the freedom of the economic man and rule of law so it conceivable for an authoritarian regime to promote this type of democracy narrowed down to the economic rights and freedom of individuals like in modern day China.

We leave for the meantime the treatment of liberal Democracy (Social Democracy) until we have seen Totalitarian Democracy.

5. Totalitarian Democracy

This is the antithesis of the liberal especially the Libertarian view point. This Democratic form could be seen in its Rousseauean form or its communist form. In all they attacked the libertarian state (democracy) as a system that defends the rich, the privileged against the poor.

5.1. Rousseauean Popular Sovereignty

Jean Jacque Rousseau, whom many have called the architect of modern Democracy regarded the Lockean Social Contract and the so-called the Rule of Law State of the libertarians, as a deceit and iniquitous ploy to cheat out the weak. He argued that neither liberty nor equality nor participation are defended in a merely legal democracy, of individualistic self-interested seekers. For him, this is a society and laws which ‘put new fetters on the weak and gave new powers to the rich which irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, established for all time the law of property and inequality, transformed adroit usurpation into irrevocable right and for the benefit of a few ambitious men subjected the human race henceforth to labour, servitude, and misery’.13 To rectify this, Rousseau identified as the central problem of politics and hence the condition of political legitimacy, the formation of a society which would assure man’s security and liberty. This society or association, will emerge through the free consent of men expressed in social contract, the terms of which will involve the total alienation of each member with all his rights to the community as a whole. He declared: ‘Each of us puts his person and all his powers in common under the supreme direction of the General will, and in our corporate capacity we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole’.14

Rousseau’s contract is not an adhoc commitment to found a society but it is the constitutive moral principle of society itself. By the contract, the individual is no longer a natural man but a citizen, ruled and ruler, subject and sovereign. Rousseauean government has been called popular sovereignty, which gives the people supreme power in which each member is both a subject and a ruler; for everybody will help in determining the laws. And by subjecting all to the same General will, inequality created by society or wealth is removed. His idea of state remains that of the Greek polis where every citizen participated directly in the making of laws.

Rousseau’s system has been described by many as a totalitarian democracy.15 Totalitarian society demand that people be organized into a solid body possessing organic unity having one mind which could be called the national will in all essential matters like, politics, religion and morality. There is no doubt that Rousseau’s popular sovereignty could have provided Dictators with dangerous weapons for crushing oppositions. His ideas inspired many one party systems in Africa like former Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and his *Green Book*. These notwithstanding, Rousseau developed an idea of democracy which not only wished that power belonged to the people but really gave it to the people. His appeal to the polis model of democracy, of direct democracy makes his democracy impracticable given the big difference between a large nation state of modern times and a Greek city state of few thousand people.

5.2. Communism

Communism is another form of totalitarian democracy or rather totalitarian democracy per excellence. It is inspired by Marx’s criticism of capitalism and its form of government which we have identified with the libertarian state. Like Rousseau who probably influenced him, Karl Marx made a scathing attack on Liberalism. He saw the liberal state as a weapon with which the rich, the Bourgeoisie exploit and oppress the worker. Liberal laws institutions are there to serve the interest of the powerful rich. The Rule of law state far from being a natural mediator is only a tool of some particular interest. He criticized the libertarian democratic order because of its alienating action especially in its economic organization. By this, he means the oppressive and alienation of the workers in a capitalist mode of production.

He observed: ‘With the private system, all methods for raising the social production of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labour, all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of the producers. They militate against the labourers, into a fragment of a man, degrade him… They estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour-process… In proportion as capital accumulation, the lot of the labour, be his payment high or low, must grow worse… Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore at the same time, accumulating misery, agony of trial, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation at the opposite pole’.16 He decried disintegration of social ties and loyalties by the profit motive. The capitalist political structure is only an instrument for the collective defense of the haves over the have nots. For Marx, then, political action will be necessary to arrive at a society which would displace the Great society of the capitalist market order and which will ensure real liberty with equality and justice and an authentic community, by destroying the duality between state and society, private and public, and with it the emergence of collective ownership of at least the means of production. Of course, the means to achieve this for Marx is through democratization. The absolute democratization of both the social and economic structure.
of the whole society, will remove the existence of all classes. It is by the suppression of private property ownership of the means of production that the socio-economic structure will be democratized and subjected to the will of the corporate workers, which will herald the putting at the disposition of all the necessary resources for a decent living. The *terminus ad quem* is for Marx the advent of communism, whose aim will be the destruction of vestiges of the capitalist system which enslaves man and created classes.

Even though the passage to communism will be realized in stages, first the socialist stage where there is still a remnant of the selfish motives, and there is the state under the dictatorship of the proletariat, then the real communism and real democracy, where there will be no state, where maximum possible equality of classes, for all human beings to economic resources, to knowledge, to political freedom.

So unlike in the libertarian state(democracy) here in Marx, what is needed is not only negative liberty but positive one i.e. power to do; what is needed is not mere equality before abstract laws but real equality; what is needed is not only for the state to protect self-interested individuals but to undertake the control of the whole economic and social process, and realize a certain social goal-radical egalitarianism.

After our early explanation of Totalitarianism, it is evidently clear that the Marxist communist democracy is Ultra Totalitarian. Here what counts is of course the whole, the individual is a mere dispensable part of such a huge machine, almost an automaton. Personal freedom is surrendered to the power of the state, and the individual has no a priori right which the state must obey. These negative effects notwithstanding, communism has at least drawn the attention of men that no democracy is worth it, if it fails to take care of the needs of real men. And such cannot be abandoned under the pretext of a mere negative freedom, or mere obedience to abstract rule of law.

6. Liberal Democracy (Social Democracy)

As we had earlier observed, liberal (social) democracy and the libertarian democracy are two democratic offshoots of the liberal tradition. And the difference between the two lies more on how much power are left in the hand of the people as whole and as opposed to the individual.

Liberal Democrats has been variously described. For some, they are constructivist liberals; for some, they are progressive reformists, and for others they are the social Democrats. Some people like Hayek has classified under the liberal Democrats: the Benthamite Utilitarians, liberal egalitarians, liberal communitarians (A.MacIntyre: M. Walzer, Sandel, M. Taylor).

Liberal democracy could partly be traced back to Rousseau; to John S. Mill, John Dewey, and has in John Keynes and John Rawls its most contemporary exponent. In contemporary times, liberal (social) Democracy has been almost synonymous with Welfarism.

Social Democracy could best be called liberalism with a heart. While it espouses the goal of freedom of the liberal tradition, the principle of individualism, the capitalist mode of production, the importance of the rule of law as did libertarian democracy, yet it feels, wants to give a humanitarian touch to the legalism and abstractness of the libertarian society. It seeks to balance the demands of freedom with that of equality and justice. They take into consideration the gross inequality of the capitalism market order, and refuse the libertarian acceptance of individuals acquisition of unlimited property and wealth in the name of liberty and hence demand some redistribution of wealth and some voluntarist intervention of the state in the market outcomes.

In a most recent formulation of the welfare principle, John Rawls in his ‘Difference Principle’ declared that inequality is permissible only if it maximizes the benefit of the least advantaged. What we are saying so far is that while liberal democrats emphasize Liberty like the libertarians, they were also aware that wealth could confer excess power which could diminish the freedom of the poor. Hence for them, freedom is not merely negative, it should also be positive. They insist that, true liberty demand creating the conditions that make its true exercise possible. Hence, they seek a delicate balance between the demands of liberty, equality and justice, the importance of the market and the need for control, the necessity of individual interests and the demand of sociality. Hence, they refuse the idea of a minimal state, for they think that the state acting for the people has some big role in the life of the people. If the state has to do such jobs, it is due to the perception of its legitimacy and status as a supreme organ of the community, and results from the emergence of the *demos (people)* element of the city state neglected by the classical or old liberalism.

Some authors have presented liberal/social democracy as a compromise form of government or political order between the libertarian state which serves as the protective umbrella for the capitalist market order and the pursuit of private interests and the totalitarian state with its politicization of the entire social and individual life. For some, it is the middle ground between the rule of law and the rule of men; between the legalism of the libertarian and dirigisme of the communist.

Democracy for social liberals becomes that in which freedom is balanced by more equality and social welfare. Hence, the demands of democracy empower the state or the legitimate representative of the people to use legislative means to address when it must to the people’s problems especially for the less advantaged. Hence, to ensure more social justice over and above mere procedure or commutative justice which the libertarian only endorses. However, all in all as in almost all forms of democracy, Social Democrats demand that the people must have say, or must choose those who must rule them, within the limits of the law made by the people themselves. The liberal democrats have been criticized by the libertarians of being on the way to totalitarianism for allowing for state intervention. They nicknamed them a bargaining or lobbying democracy, a process which violates justice and rob Peter to pay Paul. They contend that the Liberal democrats by not sticking to the abstract and general terms of the rule of law, and seek particular ends will use the political process to feather their own nests, and to engage in political bribery. Moreover, it could lead to the tyranny of the
majority which could use their numerical strength to arbitrarily impose their will on the minority, who could have been protected if the formulation of the laws were simple, general, abstract and impartial, having no particular ends.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Continuity and Discontinuity in Democracy

Our excursus into the various images of Democracy bring us back to the ancient problem of being and becoming, permanence and change. Is there anything or group of things in the midst of the various forms, and various ‘democracies’ which we can identify as the essence or the irreducible quality of a democratic set-up? Or do the various images point to new realities?

I would think that in all the various images, some irreducible elements emerge? For me, they are Four, and a group of other lessons.

The irreducible elements are active participation: in determining people’s social and political destiny; the element of freedom (which the different versions of democracy tend to interpret differently); the general well being of the people; and the body of good laws to determine the limit of legitimate action.

7.1.1. Active Participation

A democracy where there is no active participation of the citizenry is a democracy that does not exist. All the forms of democracy which we outlined even the totalitarian types made participation the central message even though each has its different way of perceiving it. And I can say that the quality of a democracy can be judged by the level of participation of the citizenry; for the strength of democracy lies in the recognition that we are limited beings, our individual knowledge and quality of choice are limited to our tiny individual experiences, and no one possesses in a stroke the whole stock of knowledge and the Good available in society as a whole. Hence, Democracy by allowing participation creates a means of mobilizing the whole variety of knowledge and choices available in society and scattered in various forms, in individuals for the common good of all. Participation increases the stock of knowledge in society and knowledge is the road to progress and development. It enables individuals to take ownership of the system which alone legitimizes the system.

This is why democracy is opposed to authoritarianism, which is a government by dictats, and decrees: a government based on the limited knowledge and decisions of an individual.

Each one according to his personality, his singularity, his unicity can bring some irreducible contribution to the community. It is an act of co-responsibility, and active recognition of the individuality without falling into individualism. Participation should exist not only at the level of elaborating the law but also at the level of being and having; Hence, democracy involves dialogue, negotiation and discussion among the citizenry, among the rulers; between the ruled and rulers. The way citizens participate must not necessarily follow one pattern for example balloting. The People as long as it is their decision whether through accepted culturally acknowledged processes of consent or otherwise can determine how their opinions can be expressed or known whether directly or indirectly. This is the only way government can be for the people and by the people.

7.1.2. The Element of Freedom

The second element of freedom is of course fundamental if participation is to be active, meaningful and sincere. An author called freedom, democracy's most precious acquisition and a vital safeguard of democracy. Political liberty is the capability of citizens to say no; no to oppression, no to corruption, no to illegality. It is the right of the citizens individually and collectively to offer their contribution on issues without fear of persecution. No democracy is worth the name in a system in which individuals are denied the right of contestation.

It is equally the right of individuals to order their lives as they like within the limits of law, constitutionally made. The importance of freedom for a democratic system lies equally in the dynamism of change it offers to a nation, the possibility of adaptation. This is why the merit of democracy does not necessarily lie in the quality of government or life it offers a society at a particular time, but also in the large vistas of opportunities and possibilities it offers a particular society.

However, for there to be political freedom open to all in society, the freedom demands the promotion of other values like equality. For a society where there is gross inequality among the citizenry cannot promise a freedom which is equally enjoyed. This is to say that democracy demands a positive effort by government to provide for the less advantaged. For wealth can confer power inimical to the freedom of others. This is a lesson neglected by the libertarians but recognized by the social democrats that freedom should be both positive and negative. A democracy where extreme riches of some cohabits with the extreme poverty of the many with the implication of the dominating influence of the rich, cannot be an effective democracy no matter the so called universal suffrage. At most it the democracy of votes not the democracy that empowers the people.

7.1.3. The General Well Being of the People

The democratic freedom is not only negative but a twin namely negative and positive is not enough to be free from something one should also be free for things. There are many people including leaders in Africa for whom democracy simply means the periodic casting of votes when millions troop out to elect the people for political offices after which the citizens are forgotten. This is the shame of democracy in Africa and in some other parts of the world where democracy...
becomes a ploy to deceive and exploit the people. Such a democracy may be the government of the people but can never be the government for the people: An amputated democracy indeed!!

For there to be a true democratic set up, the well being of all the citizenry should be the central goal of government, this was already foreseen in Aristotle’s observation that the Polis was an association of like-people for the sake of the best life or eudaemonia.21

The measure of a true democracy is how it treats its people especially the weak and the poor. In the final analysis democracy must marry the demands of freedom, equality and justice in any system chosen by a political community that is engaged in promoting an inclusive well being by which no part of society is alienated or excluded from the exercise of power or in the enjoyment of the rights of citizenship.

Particracy is not necessarily democracy. It can even be a defeat of it for it marginalizes the minority after an election and the voices they represent. Hence the need for an inclusive government in any democracy making sure that the minority has both a say and a way. Inclusivism here means evolving a system by which the majority directs the bus while ensuring that all segments of the society and parties, majorities and minorities are safe, sound and happy. This happens when every segment of society (Majorities and Minorities) participate in conferring and executing power at some level. Every true democratic society must deliberately ensure to everyone at least a minimum level of material sustenance, on this I think lie the test of a claim to any democratic credential of a system. Thus Hirsch was right when he said ‘why should I adopt moral standards helpful to the system if the outcome of the system for me cannot be validated on moral criteria?.

...unless the system can be shown to give me a fair deal in the only currency it deals in material advantage, it can’t ask me moral favors’.22

This is not a call for any type of Equalitarianism nor an attack on meritocracy or even the regulative role of the market forces, but the awareness that the humanity and dignity of every man is hurt by the degradation of the humanity of any man whether through poverty, ignorance, weakness or disability. We lift our humanity by our efforts both individually and collectively to lift and improve the well being of any other man. The state in particular cannot abdicate from this responsibility.

The fact of being born in the world no matter in what family, gives one some basic entitlement to the Goods that Mother Earth has in store both actually and potentially for her children no matter whatever other claim one may make because of his efforts or circumstances of his birth. Thus Pope John Paul II will say “ The goods of this world are originally meant for all. The right to private property is valid and necessary but it does not nullify the value of this principle. Private property is in fact under ‘a social mortgage’ which means that it has an intrinsically social function based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods.23

7.1.4. Body of Laws

The last aspect is that a democratic system in order to survive and function must have a body of laws constitutionally agreed and adopted which sets the limit within which individual actions will be tolerated. For it is a part of the democratic process that excess on the part of individuals and groups should be controlled. Freedom demands responsibility and constitutionalism in democracy acts as a system of effective regularized restraint upon government rule, and the demands of individuals. And the law should be no respecter of persons for no person has a right to lawlessness in a democratic set-up. John Rawls was right when he saw the rule of law as a coercive order of public rules addressed to rational persons for the purpose of regulating their conduct. However, laws are not mere static rules but must always be interpreted to promote the common good, to cure unintended consequences of human actions and to address dangerous emergencies which could adversely affect peoples evident well being. Hence some level of welfarist intervention is mandatory on any true democratic setup. Of course checks and balances must be envisioned by any true democratic constitution.

7.2. Lessons

With these essential aspects are some lessons, namely that there is no concrete government anywhere which incarnate democracy in its entirety, neither is it necessary that democracy must have the same face everywhere. For while we admit the importance of democracy yet its realization must take into cognizance, other social realities, other peculiar problems of a people.

This in part explains the images which democracy has taken in history. Surely democracy cannot take the same complexion in a society divided by tribalism; with a high concentration of illiteracy; mass poverty, economic dependency; as in a society, historically one nation, minimum racial or group division, a high degree of literacy; and general material well being. Democracy is so flexible as to fit intelligently and adapted into practically all forms of human culture. Thus we will agree with Leslie Lipson who said that ‘philosophies which democrats propound may place their stress on liberty while others may emphasize equality. Some have identified democracy with individualism, others with the public’s interest, with minority right or with majority rule... Comparisons must therefore be drawn not only between democratic and non democratic systems but also democracies themselves. In this way one will discover how much democracy has changed in the course of its evolution, how much it exhibits of continuity and discontinuity; how much may be altered without sacrifice of essentials and just what these essentials are’.24

The tragedy of democratic practice in Africa and its sad narrative all these years is because African nations adopted democratic models which the people do not understand or totally removed from their cultural values or ill adapted to the peoples’ idea of political participation. There is nothing democratic in floating sophisticated systems and neologisms which makes people ignorant followers.
We would finally conclude by saying there is no ahistorical, atemporal democratic paradigm to be applied to every nation without criticism or modification. Democracy has cultural and historical dimensions and democracy like technology cannot be transferred; but an ideal which any nation in search of development and stability must work for. African Nations should take note.

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