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Probing into Populism Variant: A Socio-Historical Narrative of Non-Western Populism

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Abstract

Populism became a ubiquitous term in the 20th-21st century. However, a Western narrative of the concept dominated both academic and non-academic literatures. This Western based perspective of populism was influenced by varying factors - from a disconnect between parties and the electorates (crisis of representation), antagonistic relationship between elitist parties and right wing parties or post-truth peddlers, socio-historical and economic inequality and ensuing problems to mention but a few. In an effort to delineate existing generalisations about the term populism- this article aims to espouse a methodological and normative argument which points towards a hybrid form of non-western populism as evinced in Nigeria. The first and second part of this article introduces the concept-as it operates under a constitutional democracy alongside some theoretical considerations armed by political discourse. Furthermore, a context and comparison of populism versus non-western populism is made which leads to the analytical part depicting the socio-historical birth of non-western populism. The article reveals that non-western populism is borne out of an imperialistic hegemony relation. This is in line with the socio-historical analysis of the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial epoch in reference to Nigeria. It was also revealed that non-western populism in Nigeria can be a reactionary as well as revolutionary tool against democratic elitism.

Keywords: Hybrid, Hybridity, Colonialism, Postcolonial, Populism, Non-Western Populism, Democracy

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1. Introduction

Over the last 20 years, scholarly contributions have been dedicated to populism studies from a multidisciplinary context. What most of the scholarly contributions are however guilty of, is the generalisation of the concept- as a 'one cloth fits all size concept'. There is a limited disparity between how populism operates in hybrid democratic settings or pseudo democratic settings as opposed to advanced democracies which are at the core of various analysis.

Populism as a concept is not new- however, political theory struggles to cope with its scope, the extent of its boundaries in constitutional democracy vis-à-vis political party permutations and the wider society as a whole (Urbinati, 2019; Fabbri, 2023; McGee, 2022). Populism thus far has a residual playing field- which is in a constitutional democracy. This playing field was desecrated as demonstrated in North America (Trump administration), Europe- (as evinced by the Brexit vote and its aftermath), in Germany (the Alternative for Deutschland (AFD), to mention but a few).

What is unique about this pattern according to scholars is coined as democratic backsliding (Ágh, 2016; Bogaards, 2018; Fao and Mounk, 2016; Fao and Mounk, 2017; Fukuyama, 2015; Waldner and Lust, 2018; Anna Vaschudova, 2020). However, the intensity at which established, strong institutions respond or rather do not to waves of attack from post-truth or symbolic buffoonery aided by social media and the personalities behind the discourses present an opportunity for a double-sided exploration of the concept in a constitutional democracy.

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That said, the term populism can be either employed positively or polemically. It can be positively employed in discourses and politics as a new age of political antagonism. Or it can be employed as a framing tool to categorise or target opposition parties as right wing, populist, stigmatise political parties as evil incarnates or destructive disruptors to mention but a few. The aftermath of this polemical perspective to populism in politics is hinged on the conscientious effort of liberal parties framing and securitising populism as a nuisance to democratic politics.

On the contrary to the polemical stance of populism, a democratic system according to Di Palma (1990) must guarantee free and fair suffrage within a context of civil liberties, on competitive parties, on the selection of different candidates for office, and a political institution charged with regulating the procedural form as well as guaranteeing the roles of government and opposition. Diamond *et al.* (1990) did offer similar but somewhat extended perspective as they opined democracy as a system of government with three crucial conditions: one with meaningful and extensive competition among political parties or civil groups for public office, the use of procedural elections at regular intervals with the elimination of force, constitution of a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders or policies through the medium of regular, free and fair elections in a way that no one or social group is excluded from partaking. Thus, since democracy is all about inclusion, free and fair elections- the polemical stance against populism is in its own way a contradiction of democratic norms. In a nutshell, the central problem behind the fluidity of democracy over the past decades is opined as an interpretive dilemma by Dimitrijevic (2018). This emphasises the role of discourse and the dynamics of power relations between those who rule and those who obey. In a similar vein, populism is to those in politics interpretive as well as what the wider society makes of it through discourse.

In the mirage of analytical and interpretive discourses, populism remains ambiguous as it is neither a fully-fledged ideology nor a political regime like democracy with a procedural and normative agenda (Mudde, 2004). Instead, this article sees it is an antagonistic way of politics which is aimed at taking power from the grasp of the conventional, traditional and historically big parties- or the 'too big to fail parties'. Populism coincides with the intentional and operational goal of seeking power and attention as it depends on who gets what, when and how. The 'how' for instance brings to view, the strategy, under what platform- political, group entity or movement, as well as the discourses and performative cues or symbolism involved. While the when –takes a form of programmatic content and scheduling of elections taking into consideration the strategy as well as the timing to deploy certain rhetoric or performative acts. And lastly, the 'who gets what' is a cue as well as a strategy embedded in the politics of othering and leadership charisma. Othering in this sense refers to the establishment rhetoric with constructions such as evil elites, enemies of the people, greedy elites, capitalist groups among others which should be actively deposed off power by the majority to install the will of the people.

The populist interpretive context of 'the people' begs the question of who exactly are the 'people'?

The people here, stands as a signifier and signified embodies a dual stage of relational analysis which was coined by Hardt and Negri as 'the multitude' (2004) that refers to a set of singularities-a social subject that its singularity from the political establishment or rulers cannot be equated to sameness with different components of the groups that make up a multitude. In summary, the multitude as depicted by Hardt and Negri (2004) defines an active social subject which acts on the foundation of what the singularities share in common. The shared commonality here might differ according to each polity- but it acts as a trigger to rallying up support for the populist cause. In Western parlance, this shared commonalities might be a disconnect between those that rule and those who obey, a socio-economic crisis and its impact on certain groups of people, systemic disenfranchisement, income and gender inequality, shrinking social benefits and neglect of elderly people, cultural shift or backlash and immigration policies, inability of liberal parties to satisfy the wishes of the people on certain social issues, changing policy agenda, externalities and how incumbent responds to mention but a few (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Fukuyama, 2015; Fao and Mounk, 2016, 2017; Levitsky and Way, 2015).

Thus, the task of populism is to serve as a dynamic bridge-unifying and at the same time a divisive voice through its fluidity in speech acts, oratory performance, symbolic buffoonery, style and the use of language to radically invoke or rally round support for its cause. In essence, what populism provides is a radical platform to debate and exploit existing social wrongs, systemic inefficiencies, offer itself as the saviour of the oppressed to improve its chances of grabbing power within the scope of a constitutional democracy (White, 2022; Aiginger, 2020; Vaschudova, 2020). What is of importance in this analysis is the fluidity of populism as a strategy and movement- this is evinced by its metamorphosis and dynamism before and after grabbing power. In effect, populism can be positive and negative or a combination of both simultaneously in a constitutional democracy. As a matter of fact, it may account for democratic institutions destabilisation or democratic decline. It could also bring to fore certain repressed social wrongs. Populism therefore is tied to constitutional democracy with a parasitic or symbiotic relationship. The former form of relationship is sustained when liberal parties adopt strategies that try to mirror the incessant attacks of right wing populist parties by copying

their strategies and offering counter strategies to disarm their attacks. Likewise, the symbiotic relationship could also be sustained after elections or during campaigns to call out unfulfilled electoral campaign promises. Populism could be seen as a crucial variant of political antagonism. However, the parasitic form depends on the ills and inconsistencies of constitutional democracy to survive.

Whatever the analogy, it is largely contextual than philosophical. Thus, the manifestations of populism differ from one country to another. It can be opined that populism in its purest form as a discourse or strategy maintains a rhetorical style and political antagonistic perspective. Therefore, political theory of populism must focus on discourses, social space, historical-economic space, styles, performative styles during and after electioneering or when in power in a constitutional democracy setting. The analysis of populism in power further explores the dynamism of discourses and the adopted strategies to circumnavigate the acquired power.

Having laid down the basis of what Western populism looks like- a derivative of populism as represented by another variant- non-western populism is the next focus.

2. Theoretical Consideration

Since populism emanates from democracy or a constitutional democracy setting. It is a foreign norm that is imperialistic and hegemonic in nature as it relates to the spread and adoption of democracy—either through the colonial or postcolonial epoch (Falola, 2021). The argument here is that during the pre-colonial era- a system of governance existed in each African empire, nation or community. However, this was uprooted and substituted with a foreign system implanted through coercion, superiority complex, gaslighting and imperialistic design. Osaghae (1991) reiterate this in differentiating between colonialism as an episode or epoch. The latter conclusively compares this with significant epochs of Western historiography such as the industrial revolution, world wars, cold war to mention but a few. It is vivid that due to hegemonic relations- African history or pre-colonial system of governance was effectively blurred out as inferior or not benefitting the imperialist plot (Falola, 2021). The former captivates the attention rather minimally as it perceives colonialism as an event that happened in episodes and ended with state the Westphalian principle of self-determination and sovereignty (Falola, 2021; Fasakin, 2021). What the debates about colonialism, postcolonialism or decolonisation as an epoch or episode present is the gradual erosion of indigenous culture or pre-existing political system, cultural-geographical borders replacement with European grand scheme design.

The most crucial part of this phase was the role of Western hegemony in framing which epoch is of significance. According to scholarly literatures, colonialism itself began before it was formalised by the 1884 Berlin conference (Falola 2021; 1997; Osaghae 1991; Fasakin 2021). This is evinced by the transatlantic slave trade, trade contacts and missionary works which predated the forceful invasion and subjugation of the indigenous population (Loomba, 1998; Rattansi 1997; Osaghae 1991). Colonialism though often misinterpreted in epochal terms compared to European epochs such as the transition from one mode of production to another- feudalism to capitalism cannot be justifiably compared to colonialism.

As such, a convenient starting point is the significance of colonialism to African modernity. In this regard, colonialism and its aftermath postcolonialism or coloniality are depicted as events with established institutions and loopback effect with institutional grip on historiography and postcolonial administration of the previously colonised states or third world countries (Falola, 2021; Fasakin, 2021; Rattansi, 1997; Eghosa, 1991). The semantic slippage of the terms- colonialism, postcolonialism and coloniality however is not narrowly discussed here as the terms are ambiguous and context oriented. However, colonialism and postcolonialism are seen in this article as shifts from one narrative to another. This can be seen in terms of a switch from a narrative of complete subjugation to another narrative of partial independence and a state building process.

Coloniality of power however points to an infinite and sustained process. According to Fasakin (2021) coloniality of power is the global multifaceted system of control and domination intended to succeed direct European colonialism in non-Western contexts. This can be evinced in the educational curriculum, social structures, political system, cultural hybridity, religious hybridity, modern capitalist structure, languages to mention but a few.

To buttress the foregoing, Fasakin (2021) depicted the African situation as underwhelmed by coloniality of power. Coloniality of power here refers to the fact that despite most African states gaining formal independence, there is no fundamental transformation from colonialism to postcoloniality. This is evinced by the fact that colonial institutional arrangements remain active (constitution, religion, knowledge production, political system, languages, etc.) and institutionalised with stubborn hybrid structures. This stubborn hybrid structures are a product of disguised or pseudo decolonisation alongside a recalibrated world order which works in favour of subtle imperialism and malleable indigenous elites (Fasakin, 2021; Said, 1993).

Furthermore, Taiwo (1993) captivates the impact of an altered mode of knowledge production on African political thought as well as on knowledge. His argument centered around the Pre-colonial era mode of knowledge production which had a specific material structure as well as social relations. This was embedded in several aspects of life-namely, agrarian production, systems of myths, oral traditions, communal values, the political and religious figures, place of worship or material structures such as shrines and public spaces. The aftermath of replacing indigenous mode of knowledge production with a foreign mode of knowledge production is often understudied. The replaced system or calibrated form is in modern day a global capitalist system on which the interconnectedness of the world is exaggerated via foreign exchange, stock trading or financial markets and digitalisation. The irony of this is that- the more advanced you are in this age- the most likely relevant you remain in global context.

Thus, for arguments sake- China remains relevant because of its population size, technological innovation, military and economic strength breaking up a unipolar world that existed after the cold war (Arniel 2024). From that perspective emanates the position that Western powers remain relevant in this global economic order because of what they possess and how they can sustain their position by sustaining the recalibrated world order and hegemony from a postcolonial perspective.

If the above is true, then analysis of populism vis-à-vis its variant must react to the differential socio-structures or historical past and enabling factors to economic political underdevelopment in states that have been subjected to fuel globalism at the expense of complete decolonisation and full blown recovery from Western hegemony. Instead, there is a center-periphery relation. The vivid point here is that despite the recalibration of global world order into spheres of influence and the integration of previously colonised states into it (Fasakin, 2021). This recalibration according to Fasakin (2021) meant the coloniser indirectly maintaining a subtle imperialistic agenda. Thus, previously colonised states were merely at disadvantage as they keep playing catching up or simply cannot get up to speed due to internal wrangling caused by hybridised stubborn structures.

At this juncture, it is crucial to shed some light on the ever elusive concept- populism.

Populism according to Urbinati (2019) can be operationalised in two directions: the minimalist and maximalist theoretical path. The former includes the interpretivist scope that consider ideological tropes, political style vis-a-vis communication style alongside national culture and strategies utilised by leaders to attain power. Within this minimalist perspective, we have Mudde (2004) which perceives populism as a thin-centered ideology that categorises the society into two homogenous alongside antagonistic group. Here the polarity between the elite and the people is exploited in political terms. The tension between establishment politicians or partisan supporters and the masses or multitude is intensified on varying national issues in a constitutional democracy. One agenda that runs deeply into this discourse is manipulation of the masses by appealing to an affective arrangement through charisma alongside laser targeted speech talks. Following this, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) see populism as a discourse that embodies a political rhetoric or style. Thus, the operationalisation of populism here is compatible with both submissions. Populism despite its thin-centered ideological stance- can also extend beyond and be a strategy or style. A strategy that fosters rallying around of the masses for political benefit.

The latter-maximalist perspective entails a discursive and constructivist conception of the people. What the people constitutes here is as far as it goes in populism- a constructed set of people who share the same antagonistic appeal toward the establishment politicians or buy into the core ideas of the political leader. This presents politics as a friend/enemy or good/bad partisan/non-partisan hegemony. The constructive as well as the discursive part of the maximalist theory of populism as developed by Urbinati (2019) maintains an overlap with the minimalist theory, however, it does not perceive populism as a strategy. Instead, due to the combined power of duality- an enemy is constructed and a discourse pertinent to the enemy is sustained in the public sphere. In both theoretical parlances, 'the people' and its usage by populist figures is an empty signifier which could mean different things in different societies and political structures. However, this empty signifier is fuelled by dissatisfaction to the present state of things, or total dissatisfaction at the present political coalitions or parties which have fostered unheard minority issues or adequate representation of certain groups.

3. Contexts and Comparisons

The fluidity of populism as a concept in a constitutional democracy makes it impossible for generalisations and paves way for comparative analysis dependent on language shifts, speech acts, discourses, societal wrongs exploited by right-wing politicians or the imminent external and internal issues facilitating a divide in the polity (Urbinati 2019; Bonikowski 2017). In some countries, populism is interwoven in a nativist versus immigration discourse, or the construct of the first occupants versus exodus of economic migrants or asylum seekers (Ingelhart and Norris, 2016; Resnick, 2010).

The same can be said about populist representation and configuration in different countries. Some take on a centre-periphery cleavage or an urban- rural cleavage, or a pure concentration on rural areas to exploit populist strategies to balance party competition by securitising the alarming rate of rural unattractiveness (Resnick 2010; Urbinati, 2019). The variety of past and present populisms however, shows that in terms of strategies and discourses employed- populism has always been a divisive or unifying element. Yet according to Berlin (1996), populism in its diverse variant form over the years represents an alteration of the democratic political system. This alteration has been evident in the past few years with populism and post-truth gaining the upper hand as a tool of mobilisation and balancing the political field in certain parts of the world. Bonikowski (2017) perspective discloses the dilemma faced when studying populism- namely, that populism is easily equated or simultaneously linked with nationalism, and authoritarianism. While earlier studies focused on the impact of both nationalism and authoritarianism on populist party's strategies or characteristics (Rooduijn, 2014; Mudde, 2007).

In recent researches, scholars have been able to separate both authoritarianism and nationalism from populism either perceived as a movement or a strategy (Fabrizzi, 2023; Bieber, 2018; Webber, 2023). In other words, studying populism is now approached with a lens that distinguishes the social world by meaning, intent, context and construct.

There are four established approaches to the study of populism which exist in the following form: one, as an ideational approach which suggests that populism is a 'thin centred ideology' in the political context; two, a strategic approach exploited to gain and exercise power; three, a discursive approach that articulates the antagonistic way of doing politics and fourth, a performative approach which includes the use of certain cues, symbols, styles in the public sphere to address certain social wrongs (Mudde, 2004; Moffitt, 2016; Mudde, 2017; Wodak, 2015; Melber, 2018).

Since the four approaches employed in the study of populism resonates widely across several scholarly works and discourses. The fluidity of populism comes to fore- reiterating the fact that different political environments or different political era might inform how populism is characterised. Of recent, the American Presidential election, the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, the German and Austrian elections, or elections in Italy and the Netherlands among others reiterate this point (Corduwener, 2020; Waisbord, 2018; Oklopcic, 2019; Selinger, 2020). What remains constant among all the countries mentioned above is the stage of democratic development, democratic backsliding and differing political party configuration. In the United States for instance, the 2016 Presidential election was highly focused on nativist and exclusive populist rhetoric, performative acts alongside symbolic buffoonery (Keane, 2018; Fao and Mounk, 2016, 2017; Lacatus, 2019; Bonikowski, 2017). After gaining power, the same populist characteristics was noticeable in the national policies and the foreign policy outlook of the Trump administration. The same can be opined of AFD in Germany- where the populist party drew support and representation in the Parliament(Bundestag) gaining 83 seats with corresponding supporters in Eastern Germany states of Thuringia, Saxony to mention but a few (McEvoy, 2024).

In a bid to comprehend what non-western populism portrays. A contrasting indication is introduced below by offering a Nigerian narrative from the 2019 election as well as the 2023/2024 Presidential elections.

The 2019 Presidential election in Nigeria took place under a multi-party platform with 2 major political parties (the People's Democratic Party-PDP and the All Progressive Congress-APC). The election ended with the major political parties gaining the majority of the vote which witnessed several populist strategies employed mostly by the smaller parties during the political campaign. Agbedejobi (2024 forthcoming; Okocha and Ishaku, 2023) depicted that the employment of populism by smaller/new parties in the election was a strategy aimed at levelling the political playing field which is typically in a center-periphery pattern. While this strategy did not yield the much needed victory in terms of acquiring power and representation for the smaller parties in Nigeria. It created a multitude unified by populist rhetoric and cues with singularity in terms of backlogged social wrongs, socio-economic marginalisation, inequality, to mention but a few (Agbedejobi, 2024 forthcoming).

Another definitive finding in the research (Agbedejobi, 2024 forthcoming), was that established parties in Nigeria also have their candidates utilising some populist cues which resonate with blame apportioning. This signals the othering process in communication or the populist plot of creating a saviour/enemy complex. In Summary, non-western populism is anchored on the existing social issues or wrongs in former colonised countries which is politicised and re-echoed or reiterated for the sake of exploiting that narrative for political gain.

4. Socio-Historical Process of Non-western Populism

Although most African states adopted democracy as a form of governance post self-determination or independence. Africa is home to more than three quarters of the world's fragile democracies (European Parliament, 2021). Howbeit, most

are faced with several endogenous challenges mainly in the execution of democratic principles and rule of law. Endogenous challenges might include: minority rights exclusion, state formation, ethnic or tribal configuration, pogrom, hybrid power sharing, multiculturalism, ethno-religious divisions, military coup d'état, institutional capture alongside ethnic dominance to mention but a few (Trzeciński, 2021; Ugwuona, 2020; Nzitatira *et al.*, 2023; Agbiboa and Okem, 2011; Adenuga *et al.*, 2023; Bradley, 2005).

In other words, the plethora of challenges together with foreign hegemonic nature of democracy and its institutions alongside the learning process for democratic consolidation shape the socio-historical discourse of non-western populism. Hybridity is at the core of colonial discourse. This is exemplified by the combination of existing social values, culture and western oriented institutions alongside spillovers from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era (Decker, 2016; Taiwo, 1993; Fasakin, 2021; Falola, 2021). These spillovers create a sort of hybridised identity in which the colonised is hooked to a global world with democracy, globalisation and capitalism dominant. In a bid to play catch up with the globe the colonised prioritises western ideas and institutions at the neglect of indigenous beliefs or systems to embrace either a western based way or a combination of both indigenous and western way. These misplaced identities are seen in daily social practices in Nigeria. For instance, people still opt for the traditional wedding in Nigeria but this goes in combination with a church wedding or court wedding followed by a reception. Whereas pre-colonial era, most weddings were purely done the traditional way with a reception afterwards. Hybridity is omnipresent in virtually everything in Nigeria. Ethnic and religious affiliation also plays a pivotal role in the hybrid nature of relations. This perception is rightly depicted by Falola (2021) in which he disclosed that the imposition of European values, the prioritisation of European civilisation and knowledge production as against the Nigerian culture or indigenous sites of knowledge created a state with fractured and fragmented spirit. Thus, the exoticisation and objectification of Nigeria by the coloniser totally ignored the culture and the complexity of the pre-colonial societies and governance. This led to the process of uprooting indigenous knowledge replaced by an "European modernisation programme". This draconian plan heralded a forced amalgamation without a social contract with the indigenous people with policies, constitutions and political rules favouring the coloniser. It is this same assemblage that continues- although not directly colonised by a European empire – in Nigeria the coloniality of power lives on through democratic elitism with institutional capture and an entitled sense to power and state resources (Fasakin, 2021; Falola, 2021).

As suggested by Agbedejobi (2022) Nigeria practices a hybrid form of democracy with some form of autocratic legalism and illiberalism. There are several reasons for such hybridity. One namely, the foreign idea of democracy and the other issue which is the chaotic or non-systematic transition from colonialism to self-independence and nation building. Fasakin (2021) perceived this symptom as coloniality of power. Coloniality of power according to Fasakin (2021) is a subtle continuity of the colonial situation in postcolonial Africa. This is evinced by the dependence of African states on the Western vortex of influence through liberal market forces, Western institutional and constitutional replication by the colonised, commercialisation of the economy through policies that are not compatible to the socio-economic landscape (Gatwiri *et al.*, 2020; Makki, 2015). This is further aggravated by the fact that African states are not major players in the global market- a large percentage of African states skipped the industrialisation epoch to the globalisation epoch and this made them a consuming rather than a manufacturing state (Nwokeabia, 2001; Frankema and van Waijenburg, 2018; Nyamnjoh, 2000). This inferiority in terms of positioning in global terms is what dates back to the pre-colonial/colonial era where raw materials and slaves for labour were exported from Africa to other parts of the globe and the profit thereof was rarely seen by the indigenous people from which these resources was misappropriated (Oelofsen, 2015; Henn and Robinson, 2023; Nyamnjoh, 2000). The same trend continued in Nigeria as most of Nigeria's crude oil is been refined on external shores and delivered back to Nigeria to be sold. While this trend is said to be broken-by Dangote refinery, the sustainability of such and its efficiency is yet to be seen (Ogbonna, 2023).

Hybridity as discussed above and its aftermaths however, does not exist in a vacuum. It stems from a socio-historical space which is deeply entrenched in the socio-historical birth of Nigeria (Falola, 2021). This affords us a lens of understanding how colonial governance functioned and the artefacts or stubborn institutions it left even after Nigeria gained independence.

The colonial corporatisation of governance is one step in the direction of viewing hybridity as a catalyst of social wrongs in modern day Nigeria governance. Hybridity and its evergreen stubborn institutions are situated in the pre-colonial alongside colonial epoch and extend beyond that epoch. The adoption of indirect rule system in Nigeria is a critical juncture. Despite several indigenous resisting actions in form of guerrilla war or uprisings (Falola, 2009; Mkandawire 2008; Falola, 2021). The superior artillery and weapons of the colonizer conquered the indigenous resistance. Thus, conquering through violence and killings cemented the subjugation of the colonised. In other words, after the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914- colonised territories was seen as an extension of a large empire or vassal.

Furthermore, colonial corporatisation however through indirect rule system saw the privatisation of colonial governance through companies like the East Indian Company, the Royal African Company or the United African Company in 1929 which subtly introduced an element of capitalism with a system of looting resources and self-aggrandisement (Burgis, 2016; Onimode, 1978). According to Stern (2008) colonial corporatisation anchors on three processes, namely: granting of English Crown charters like a franchise economic style, enacting of treaties and signing of contracts. Among all the processes of colonial corporatisation- granting of charters gained an upper hand. Since the coloniser adopted indirect rule system of governance. The charters granted to the companies indirectly stamped the authority and legitimacy of the Crown on all activities ongoing in the colonial state. In a nutshell, the company had both political and commercial control over the trading territories (Stern, 2011).

As an aftermath, colonial corporatisation in modern day Nigeria extends beyond both politics and the economy. For the former, despite the practice of democracy- democratic elitism in political parties and politics paves way for godfatherism, prebendalism, misappropriation of public funds and democratic elitism. This shares a similar attribute to the charter system introduced by the coloniser. This is evinced in two forms in modern day Nigeria- public access to political representation is based on the politics of 'who you know among the elite or godfathers', the financial purse of the potential candidate and the consensus of political candidates among democratic elites (Aveni, 2019; Falola, 2021). Democratic elitism as opined by Bealey (1996) guarantees the government of a few over the majority. The few elites dictate to a large extent the holistic shape of the state. In Nigerian parlance, this is more or less the case- as the transition from military leadership to civilian leadership was basically a recycling of old faces from the past. The leadership dilemma is best captured by the term poverty of leadership (Ikegbu *et al.*, 2020).

The Nigerian leadership crisis is an evergreen issue. It stems from the colonial era in which educated or illiterate indigenous people were disenfranchised from politics. The transition to self-independence however, had its challenges deeply rooted in the chaotic handover from the colonisers to the nationalist. While colonialism or the other 'ism's' are not totally responsible for the leadership crisis in modern day. It is at the core of the issue based on the following events; forced nature of the amalgamation of northern and southern protectorate for administrative and logistic convenience, little to no protection of minority rights, lack of any multicultural fostering policies despite the ethnic divide alongside lack of entrenchment of such diversities in constitution or legal instruments like the Clifford or Richard constitutions of 1922 and 1946. A culmination of the foregoing led to the divisive nature of modern Nigeria amongst ethnic, religious or partisan politics divide. Efforts to address or revisit the lack of a social contract fostered by the forced nature of the union or formation of Nigeria has over the years yielded no positive results. This is evinced by the sovereign national conference report and the evergreen issue of instability and conflicts (BBC News, 2014; Etemire, 2014).

In addition, the historical dynamics of ethnicity and religion play a larger role in daily transactional and interactional communication as well as politics in Nigeria. Notions of kinship, ethnic bond, language and elite closure are othering tools within a group.

Also, language and religion play a crucial role in historical dynamics as well as power. The first political parties established after Nigeria's independence for instance had an element of both religion and language as well as ethnic configuration. The Action Group (AG) in the Southwest, the National Council of Nigeria (NCNC) and the Cameroons and the Northern People's Congress (NPC). These political parties were under leadership from an ethnic figure from a specific ethnic community. AG was led by Obafemi Awolowo, NCNC by Nnamdi Azikwe and NPC by Ahmadu Bello. This ethnic configuration remains till date, howbeit in a more explosive manner which is aided by democratic elitism. The first party configuration post-independence can be argued to exemplify a teething face of representative governance. However, the configuration itself vividly shows the error of the European led policies in a multicultural setting. These errors led to schism among ethnic groups and to the Biafra civil war which pitched one dominant ethnic group against the others. That said, while political party development in Nigeria is lauded for its multiparty system configuration. It is still predominantly a two party system with modern day Nigeria having the PDP and APC as the most likely political parties to win the race for presidency in Nigeria. The party alongside political configuration is best depicted by Nnoli (1978) as a colonial architecture of confused identities. For Mbah and Nwangwu (2014) ethnicity in Nigeria is a politically constructed signifier which is susceptible to flexible manoeuvres fitting certain constructible boxes. The same position is reiterated by Falola (2021) depicting ethnicity as an umbrella term or political signifier. Further arguments made by Falola (2021) reiterate the difference between ethnicity in pre-colonial /colonial era as against postcolonial era. Ethnicity as used in the pre-colonial era referred to ethnicities such as the diverse Yoruba tribes like the Egba, Ijebu, Awori, Oyo. In contrast, during colonialism and postcolonial era, ethnicities fluidity as a construct merges several different ethnic tribes under one canopy. Thus, today- when we refer to the Yoruba ethnic group as one- we forget how large such a group is and how complex it is to reduce a group composed of different sub-ethnicities just to one. All this reductivist and constructivist

ploy however, hails back to the critical juncture of amalgamation and the consequent policies and politics that shaped Nigeria during colonialism and postcolonialism.

Worryingly, corruption and patrimonialism emanated from the colonial corporatisation of Nigeria. Corruption according to Ogunyemi (2014) confers a reward on perpetrators at the expense of their victims. This is just a mild definition of the concept. In a more advanced form, corruption is defined by Otite (1983) as the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity. The relationship between the colonised and coloniser positioned one off better than the other. The accounts of Ogunyemi (2014) evince corruption and gross misappropriation of public funds or spoils from conquest as it is in this case during the colonial era and decolonisation era. His accounts also justify the notion of the colonial authorities' conscious constitutional and institutional capture enabling such acts. Osoba (1996) historical narrative of the colonisation, decolonisation and Independence era succinctly suggest that institutions were carved out by the colonial authority to accommodate capital accumulation and wealth at the expense of the indigenous people (Osoba, 1996). Further accounts point to the fact that during the decolonisation era or transitioning period to indigenous rule, Nigerian ruling bourgeoisie were left in public offices to represent the interest of the colonial authority. Through the Nigerian ruling bourgeoisie, access to several lucrative deals and markets were still open to the colonial authority. Thus, as Fasakin (2021) rightly mentioned the decolonisation era was merely a chaotic and short-lived transition into handpicked Nigerian ruling bourgeoisie whose interest was similar to that of the colonial authority.

5. Non-western Populism in Nigerian Politics

In the light of the foregoing socio-historical narrative. Non-western populism in Nigerian parlance is a creation of several epochal challenges, stubborn structures, democratic elitism and irreparable burnt bridges which led to the disconnection between the people and politics. All here such disconnection is solely dependent on a lack of accountability in governance, evergreen socio-historical wrongs, exploitation of ethno-religious resources, political gaslighting alongside affective democracy.

As a result of the above disclosed argument, I draw on a social science theoretical perspective in explaining the parasitic nature of populism in a constitutional democracy.

Hanson (2001) suggests an institutionalist approach to categorising whether a democracy has attained consolidation or not. This should be the case in most formerly colonised states. Hanson (2001) critiques the dominant approaches in the transitology and consolidology literatures with such renowned scholars like Diamond (1997), Linz and Stephan (1996) that suggested that a country's populace must experience attitudinal as well as behavioral change to accept democracy as the only game in town. This political culture perspective is merely teleological considering the impossibility of the entire populace to experience such attitudinal changes even over decades or centuries. This is evinced by one of the oldest continuous democracies – the United States of America. It is empirically and statistically impossible to explain the political culture rationale in terms of the authoritarian populist leanings of the Trump administration. The question that stems from such supposition – is can we imply that Americans despite the peaceful and continuous democratic transitions from one leader to another have taken democracy as the only game in town? *Emphasis* here is based on the *attitudinal and behavioral* perspective of political culture which should explain the outcome of election results and the electoral college decision. Hanson further debunks the claims of political culture literatures by citing the incessant division in the United States – in which white supremacists, prejudiced killings and shootings of minority African-American citizens, evangelical community and other religious communities actively refute democratic procedures and values.

Hanson's other critique rest on the rational choice perspective. This emphasises the establishment of an institutional framework which ensures predictable democratic behavior is rewarded and deviant behaviors are sanctioned. In other words, political competition under such conditions according to Przeworski (1991) becomes consolidated, when democratic norms are: 'the only game in town'. The nature of such theorising is naïve and assumes that under conditions of great uncertainty or rent-seeking behavioral disposition of political elites, that the scale of balance would be tilted in favour of democracy.

If populism playing ground is constitutional democracy. Then that of Non-western populism is hybrid or pseudo democracies.

As noted below in the transcript of African Action Congress (AAC) Presidential candidate- Omoyele Sowore for the election campaign 2023 presidential election. A noticeable set of basic populist rhetoric is evident.

Figure 1, affirms the existence of basic populist rhetoric of criminalising, blame apportioning or othering of establishment politicians by populist leaders. While Figure 1 reiterates the socio-historical tension that offsets non-western populism or the adoption of populism. It rather confirms the difference in scope of internal social wrongs, how credible elections are and the stage of attitudinal and behavioral development perspective of political culture.

In a nutshell, non-western populism is simply an insurrection against democratic elitism and as such cannot be reduced to a polemical rhetoric or performative stunt by the political opposition.

“The two criminal political parties –the APC and the PDP are going to stop functioning after today.

Crowd chants and applause.

Am not making just an ordinary declaration. Our declaration today follows the path of what we started doing in 2018 and 2019. And that was that this country is in need of a revolution. And that revolution must be about total freedom for the Nigerian people.

We covered over 35 states. Had we had leaders, the herder – farmer crisis would have been resolved in a very simple way. Had we had leaders, we would have hospitals that function today such that the President of Nigeria cannot treat himself of common cold in Nigeria.

Had we had leaders, some of them that are contesting today would never go near the position of power.

Therefore, as soon as I become the President of Nigeria. Because it is not a matter of if I won't be..

You are talking to the first democratically elected President of Nigeria.

Crowd heard clapping and chanting”

Figure 1: Excerpt from Sowore Declaration in Abuja for 2023 Presidential Race

Source: YouTube-Sahara TV 2022

6. Conclusion

The goal of this article was to disclose a narrative presenting a case for non-western populism.

Non-western populism has been defined as a product of constitutional democracy yet within another deficient form of constitutional democracy. This is experienced in democracies that experienced colonialism especially those with a hybridised identity. The argument here, was to emphasise the position of democracy as a hegemonic design for the colonised and a tool shaping global spheres of influence.

Instead of embarking on the polemical status of populism as used in western politics and scholarly literatures. This article espouses that non-western populism might be a tool in displacing democratic elitism or established politicians. Since the goal of those who adopt populism as a strategy is to gain power. It might yet be a little bit earlier to predict that non-western populism might rise to the occasion of grabbing power in Nigeria. However, what is noticeable is the effort towards sensitising the electorates and creating awareness.

Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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