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# Debating the Democracy Dilemma, Question and Prospects in Africa: A Statement in Theoretical Hermeneutics

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### Abstract

The debate concerning the dilemma, question and prospect of democracy in Africa is a topical, thematic and timely discourse among scholars both within and outside Africa. Indeed, the logic and language of these debates have always been a lingering and lively engagements. To this end, there are plethora of views concerning the nature and nurture of democracy in Africa. However, a large percentage of these treatments and analysis have focused more on methodological frameworks that are purely descriptive, sociological and empirically quantitative approaches. This paper attempts an understanding of these salient issues with respect to democracy in Africa from a different perspective which is philosophical method of hermeneutics which allows a free flow of the application of critical thinking and interpretation in the comprehension of the democracy question in Africa. The paper concludes that critical thinking and interpretation of the issue of democracy in Africa is necessitated by the need to understand that empirical details and data ought to rely on the relevance of theoretical hermeneutics that has been undeservedly omitted in researches about democracy in Africa.

**Keywords:** *Democracy, Dilemma, Question, Prospect, Theoretical Hermeneutics*

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## 1. Introduction

Hermeneutics is the ideology, science, philosophy or the art of interpretation. Basically, it can be respectfully regarded as a scientific and philosophical enterprise and engagement that emanates and emerges from man's encounter and experience in his existence on the earth. It could follow from this that the universe is replete with fantastic phases that requires the cognitive and cogitative comprehension of man. From these, it could mean that man seeks to interpret the universe and thinks, processes and experiences within the universe just because man is a creative being that endlessly interprets. So, man is an interpreter just as it is true that he is equally a knower. It is, therefore, correct that the art of interpretation is a human-centered business, activity, enterprise as well as discipline.

Given the above, it could be contended without any sense of contradiction that hermeneutics is both a discipline as well as a philosophical methodology. As a discipline, it is concerned with interpretation of an engagement, an orientation or a preoccupation. As a philosophical methodology, it could be conceived as one of the ways or means through which realities around man can be harnessed, accessed and known. In this sense, hermeneutics, as the science of interpretation,

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can be branded as ensconced in the utility and significance of epistemology. In other words, hermeneutics can be branded as epistemologically significant. It is this kind of philosophical methodology that some philosophers such as Jurgan Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer referred to as interpretivism. According to these scholars, our experience of things around us is necessarily filtered through a familiar way of understanding things. It could mean that experience of reality, experience of existence provokes interpretive trend, trait, temperament and tendencies in man which means that man is naturally an interpreter with such traits, naturally inherent in man; experiences of reality only triggers them into functional use as at when due and appropriate. These hermeneutic traits in man can exist either at the dimension of theory which makes them theoretical or at the level of empiricism which makes them practical. Indeed, philosophy admits of both theory and praxis and thoughts and practices.

The history of democracy has been intensely dramatic, by turns exhilarating and chilling. But viewed less exuberantly and more parochially, its keynote is, above all, its determined ordinariness, its will and its capacity to domesticate the life of a human community, and to do so all the way through. As an old but vigorous idea, it sponsors the belief that in human political communities, it ought to be ordinary people [the adult citizens] and not extra-ordinary people who rule (Idowu, 2005). Although this is not how things are in the world in which we live, however, the democratic value and idea have become the reigning conception across the world. The idea of democratic rule may appear obvious; it also presents the idea of a strange and implausible doctrine. The power and appeal of the democratic idea come from its promise to render the life of a community something willed and chosen – to turn the social and the political existence that human beings share into a framework of consciously intended common action. At the beginning of the 1990s, the democratic fever caught up and got hold of African nation especially with the collapse of the socialist ideology in former USSR. However, the process of democratization, its consolidation continues to be an experience in wonder.

In this paper, a bit of theoretical hermeneutics is to be deployed in a careful comprehension, cautious consciousness and concrete collocations of ideas and issues of interests that assists in dissecting and articulating the democracy question in Africa.

## 2. Democracy as a Contested Concept

To be contested can be said to mean a subject of dispute, contention or litigation. This implies that there are controversies concerning the acceptability or otherwise of such an idea or issue. Democracy as a contested concept therefore suggests that the concept “democracy” has been a subject of dispute among thinkers such that there have been debates in relation to its depiction. Given this contested nature of the democratic idea, it is, therefore, important to deploy the methodology of theoretical hermeneutics or interpretivism in understanding why this is so.

## 3. Why is Democracy a Contested Concept and What is the Contestation About?

Democracy is a form of political system with its first historical appearance dated back to the fifth century B.C following its coinage by Herodotus of Athens from two Greek words “demos” and “kratein” meaning “people” and “rule” respectively (Akindede, 1994). This etymologically means “the people’s rule” or “the rule of the people”. It is in this sense that Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as a government of the people, by the people and for the people (Lincoln, 1863). These definitions can be said to be inadequate to explain what democracy is or should be because both the word and the idea of democracy are susceptible to some internal complexities and complications (Hermet, 1991). For instance, if democracy is defined as the rule of the people, then the question is, who are the people? Who are to rule or to be ruled? How is the rule supposed to be orchestrated?, etc. These issues open the concept to a wide range of interpretation and emphasis, making it a difficult one to define, such that attempts by scholars and political theorists to give an adequate definition have been unproductive, hence no universal definition for the concept. In this sense, the necessity of accommodating, acknowledging and allowing the method theoretical hermeneutics becomes obvious.

What is contested is, thus, about how to give a complete definition of democracy, what its intrinsic features are, the range of its operation, the scope, practices that exemplify democratic order and whether democracy is merely a way of life or a form of government. This contestation have attracted several conceptions and different perspectives on defining democracy, hence, the need for a method of sagacious interpretivism.

## 4. Conceptual Approaches to the Meaning and Nature of Democracy

To establish a literal meaning for democracy, Lord Bryce contends that democracy is a form of government in which the will of the majority of qualified citizens rules, sharing similar conception with John plamenatz who maintains that democratic government means government by persons freely chosen by and responsible to the governed (Okotoni, 2001). Schumpeter (1962) also conceives democracy as a method of reaching at political decisions and which citizens acquire power to decide by means of a competitive election. Similarly, Appadorai (1974) defines democracy as a system

of government under which the people exercise their political power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves. However, there have been some radical scholars who argued that democracy is more than power to perform the regular ritual of voting. For Diamond *et al.* (1988), democracy is expected to provide for competition among individuals and organized political parties vying for political offices, there should be participation by the public in the election of leaders through regular and fair election, and that no major social group must be excluded at the level of civil and political liberties, freedom of expression, freedom of press, freedom to form and join organizations and the likes, sufficient to ensure integrity of political competition and participation.

It is obvious from the analysis above that the idea of concise and all embracing definition of democracy is problematic. The problematic nature of these exercises and endeavours stem from the dimensional dynamisms and deliberate but determined diversities and the distinct sense of difference encoded in man, his nature and the way man views things and interprets events, experiences and existential encounters around him. It is, thus, no wonder that man's subjective side specially plays a serious, strong and solid roles in what he considers the nature of things around him to be. In a way, therefore, it can pontificated and postulated that the salience and significance encoded in the method of interpretivism is sourced and rated in man's subjective side, strength and sustainable stay which is why democracy, necessarily, attracts divergent definitions and conscious but conflicting conceptions. However, the definitions though distinct and ranging from one perspective to the other, help to analyze the nature of democracy, specifying some values, norms, attributes and features.

## 5. Basic Tenets of a Democratic Order

The basic tenets of democratic order are also known as the pillars or the principles of democratic rule. It is on the basis of these principles that democracy is generally evaluated. They tend to differentiate democratic rule from any other types of government. They include: *Citizens' Participation, Competitive Elections, Economic Freedom, Political Tolerance, Transparency and accountability, Checks and Balances, Protection of Human Rights and Rule of Law*, (Weiner and Ozbudun, 1987; Boyer, 1992; Diamond *et al.*, 1988; Karl, 1990).

However, the question of the relationship between democracy and these principles can be raised pertaining to its evaluation. Is the relationship that of necessity, such that all these pillars must be evident in a state before such state can be said to be democratic or that of contingency whereby they may or may not be evident? If contingent, is there a specific number of these pillars a state must have to be termed as democratic? Practically, the relationship has been that of contingency and sort of arbitrary, whereby states possessing any of these are regarded as being democratic. Perhaps, this explains the basis of the philosophical problems on democracy as a political idea. Again, the necessity – contingency angle of arguments could be conceived as a positive and relevant issue worthy of consideration in determining, depicting and deliberately discussing the problematic saga, scenario and situation with respect to democracy and democratic experiment in Africa. Are these pillars of democracy expected to be fully incorporated into Africa political systems before adjudging such systems as truly democratic or do they only require partial existence in Africa? As a matter of fact, it appears that the terminology 'democracy' and the political space, topography and conditions are both problematic in their own right which is why this interpretative exercise is, unarguably, needed.

## 6. Characteristics of Democracy

Following through some Conceptual analysis and principles of democracy that has been spelt out, it is obvious that democracy is more than a theoretical system. It rests upon some certain group of values, attributes and practices which are fundamental but not uniformly expressed. One major characteristics of democracy is the rule by majority. The decision made by the majority becomes the official policy and position accepted by all. It is because of this fact and reality that democracy is problematically described as the tyranny of the majority (Idowu, 2004). Democracy also acknowledges the rights of all citizens to differences in and of opinion, which necessitates social integration (Onu, 1994). According to John Stuart Mill, democracy also provides a conducive arena for citizens to defend their rights by securing the rights and interest of every citizens from being violated (cited by Onu, 1994). Democracy provides norms for political participation, it develops a sense of communal responsibility in citizens (Appadorai, 1974). In a true democratic atmosphere, power is distributed in many hands and many public offices who are subjected to regular changes according to the will of majority through conduct of elections (Diamond *et al.*, 1971). Given these considerations, it behooves one to submit that the democratic idea, whether in the western world, the world of orientals and the African continent, is a deeply engaging system of government. It is a radical and thought-provoking experience and experiment for those who seek to practice it. Indeed, if Dewey (1982) actually describes democracy as a way of life, then, it could be accepted as truly so because of the issues that have been raised so far in our attempt at interpreting democracy, democratization and the democracy question in Africa correctly and with a sense of plausible conclusiveness.

## 7. Essential Conditions for Democracy

Owing to the fact that there is no uniformity in the practice of democracy and that the relationship between democracy and its principles is contingent and arbitrary, the question of the essential conditions for democracy can be rightly posed. What are the features, principles, or other means whose absence in any acclaimed democratic state is a failure?

### 7.1. *Minimalists / Maximalists Conception of Democracy*

To the minimalists, any deficiency in principles related to electoral processes and practices such as competitive election and multiparty system will be viewed as democratic failure because their emphasis is on the role of election in any attempt at interpretation and understanding of democracy. Elections, to the minimalists, is the only way in which citizens can get rid of bad government which makes it important. Karl Popper and Joseph Schumpeter fall under this category. Maximalists conception of democracy is a distinguished and differentiated conception from that which is entertained, expressed and embraced by minimalists. To the maximalists, all desirable aspects of political, social and economic life should be present, intrinsic and necessary to democracy because they are the main reason why we do care about change of government. Diamond, Linz and Lipset as common upholders of this view identified competitive election, political participation and civil/political liberties as important elements of democracy on which it can be determined if its practice is successful or not (Phillip, 2019). Interestingly, the controversy between the minimalists and the maximalists concerning the truest of conditions for the existence of a democratic order, again, brings to fore the interesting interpretative dimensions inherent in human nature suggesting, quite radically, that human nature and its quest is one that is never satisfied with mere conventionalism, traditionalism and orthodoxy alone. In this sense, it becomes obvious that human nature is always ensconced on the experience and the experimentation with moods, manners and memories that are alternativistic in practice, principles and pursuit. In essence, this only shows that when ideas such as the democracy one are placed and put out for analysis and interpretations, it is not to be expected that just one angle, approach or dimension is satisfying. What his controversy has demonstrated or is still demonstrating is that no limits can be placed on man's cognitive prowess, cogitative power and the cerebral facility, apparatus and appurtenance through which the human mind interprets his environment, experiences and existential encounters that he possesses, practice, promote and pursues. Thus, it could be safely submitted that this controversy is an exceptional, excellent and exponentially expeditious display and demonstration of the merits and plausibility of methodological interpretivism [theoretical hermeneutics].

### 7.2. *Normative / Empirical Perspective on Democracy*

Democratic success evaluation also ranges from normative to empirical perspective. To the empiricists like Appadorai and J.S Mill, the key indicator of democratic quality is responsiveness, the degree at which policy outcomes reflect public opinion and interest. Since citizens participation in politics is verifiable, then it is to them the best determinant of how democratic a state is. However, scholars like Hobbes and Mill theorized about democracy within the normative perspective, stressing the notion of natural right to life, liberties, common good and civil rights. How best these are prioritized in a state determine the success /failure level of their democratic system (Akindede, 1994). Again, the beauty and the blessedness of human subjectivism, coded into what has been tagged as methodological interpretivism or theoretical hermeneutics, is the major feature, face and fact, not fiction, of the controversy between a normativist and the empiricist with respect to the best of conditions for describing a democratic order as either successful or a failed attempt.

## 8. Types of Democracy

Democracy has been classified into different types based on governing structures, mode of participation or values exercised in the system of government. This typification of a democratic idea has its own merit when placed within the context of the democracy question and character in Africa. Thus, the necessity of this approach is so obvious in as much as one of the ways through which the question of democracy in Africa is to be answered consist in knowing which brand or type of democracy is to be practiced in Africa for it to be adjudged as successful or not or even in interpreting why democracy has been a perennial perplexity in Africa. The common types are direct democracy, indirect democracy, liberal democracy and consensual democracy.

### 8.1. *Direct/Indirect Democracy*

Direct democracy is the type of democracy where citizens without the intermediary of elected or appointed officials can participate in making public decisions while indirect democracy, on the other hand, is the one in which citizens elect officials to make political decisions, formulate laws and administer programs for the public good (Konrad, 2011).

## 8.2. Liberal /Consensual Democracy

Liberal democracy is also known as western or constitutional democracy. It is a form of indirect democracy where the ability of the elected representatives to exercise decision power is subjected to the rule of law and usually moderated by a constitution that emphasize the protection of the rights and freedom of individuals (Konrad, 2011) while consensual democracy is a form of democracy where decisions are reached through consensus. Conclusions under this system are based on free debates and adequate discussions on opinions by the minority and the majority, then the more persuasive view supersedes (Wiredu, 1995).

## 9. Philosophical Perspectives on Democracy: The Import of Interpretivism

Some philosophers have theorized on democracy. The question is how paradigmatic or problematic are these conclusions on democracy? Some of these philosophers observed and pointed out flaws in the idea of democracy while some have passionately defended democracy as the best style of human governance. In what follows, an attempt will be made to understand and underscore the concept of democracy from the interpretative perspective provided by philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes and some others. This insightful interpretative analysis is needed so as to illuminate the necessity of philosophy as not only foundational to the idea of democracy itself, historically, but, also, as a fundamental requirement in deepening our comprehension of the trials and travails of Africa in her experimentation with and consolidation of democracy. This is because if the problem of democratic consolidation is to be deepened and comprehended in the concrete sense, it is believed that the interpretative perspective provided by these philosophers have a seminal and significant role to play. In other words, African democratic malaise can be best understood when philosophy is accorded its respectable place and pride and is considered a recognizable mouthpiece.

### 9.1. Plato on Democracy

Plato (360 BCE) in his celebrated work “*The Republic*” describes democracy as a rule by “demagoguery”, leaders who manipulate for personal gain and the unwise. To him, democracy is an unstable form of government which is just a step away from tyranny. It is ruled by unwise because it is a move from oligarchy, where rulers aim wealth and reduce ordinary citizens to poverty such that when it becomes a democratic city, according to Plato, the people cares nothing for the past behavior of man who wants to be their leader, he only needs to proclaim himself as a friend of the people and he will be honored. Meanwhile, only a philosopher king has the necessary qualities to rule a just society. Hence, democracy, according to Plato, does not place a premium on wisdom and knowledge-seeking as an inherent good but prioritized wealth and property accumulation as the highest good. Democracy becomes a step away from tyranny because to Plato, when the poor wins or exile the opponents, having the equal civil rights and opportunities of office and appointment to office being as rule by lots, all we have is a population of citizens dominated by their desires and an opportunistic ruler that manipulates them for personal gain (Lane, 2006).

Although, not all Plato’s analysis fits the modern day democratic rule, it is submitted that it provides an interesting insight into the success and failure of modern day governance especially in Africa where demagogues, charlatans, screwed and skewed personalities secured access to ‘democratic power’ one way or the other, as shall be analyzed below. It is obvious how citizens become impatient under a particular supposed unfavorable regime, clamoring for change and later fall victim of a friendly pretense of the opposition party. Not being wise to assess the agenda of their new friend, they cast their vote and end up in a more worsened state. Also, there are cases of favoritism and passing bills for personal interest, protest against treaties, etc. which affect the peace of the society all in the world of rights and freedom. However, his claim that democracy leads to tyranny can be questioned since there have been exceptions, some modern societies had been and is successfully practicing democracy without traces of tyranny. Examples include, Norway, Iceland and Canada. But, when interpreted in the light of Africa’s experience in democracy, Plato may be right because all manners of personalities utilize democratic power to devalue the democratic spirit and sense, for example, many African leaders are fond of denying the right to protest in a democratic order, all in the name of rule of law, national security and interest as we had in Nigeria during the ENDSARS protest of 2020. Also, one may find his idea of philosopher king to be unrealistic, given the role consent in contemporary polity, being a philosopher does not necessitate being an expert on the interests of the people. It is also one thing to be knowledgeable, it is another to be politically inclined.

### 9.2. Aristotle on Democracy

Aristotle (340 BCE) in his “*Politics*” distinguishes between good and bad forms of ruling in all the basic systems, classified democracy as a bad form of a rule by many, being not for common interest. For him, tyranny is a kind of monarchy which has in view the interest of the monarch only, oligarchy has in view the interest of the wealthy, while democracy has in view the interest of the needy. He maintains that the political leaders must not live the life of mechanics

or tradesmen because such a life is ignoble and inimical to virtue. Neither must they be farmers since leisure is necessary both for the development of virtue and performance of political duties. Aristotle believes that democratic rule is by and for the needy and that is a pervasion of the state because government should be by those people with enough time on their hands to pursue virtue which is common interest. His view can be reduced to the fact that he sees the will of the majority as sovereign in a democratic state instead of rule of law (Baggini, 2018; Gill, 2019).

However, Aristotle's claims for not committing government into the hand of the needy may not be of equal cogency when viewed in the light of the modern democracy. The wealthy, despite being few, possess the power to desire more wealth, they are even the ones with the greatest bid to government offices since the needy cannot meet the resources required for running in elections. To the rich, politics is more of a career, their interest supersedes that of the public, how then are they supposed to give themselves to the pursuit of virtue or political duties? It is in fact true that the system will be best if it seeks the common interest but how practicable is it, given human nature as self-interested? In Africa, for example, Aristotle's dilemma seem to be present and a troublesome issue yet to be overcome. One thing is central in Aristotle's equation on democracy, which is the necessity of promoting, practicing and pursuing virtue since the state is noted for that, the pursuit of virtue is completely nailed; the only definition of virtue by African politicians is nothing but self-interest: they have money and resources but they seek for power in order to multiply the money and resources at the detriment of ordinary citizens whose interests a state is meant to promote. The experiment and experience in Africa could make Aristotle to experience a radical shift and reactive turn in his grave.

### **9.3. Thomas Hobbes on Democracy**

Hobbes (1651) in his social contract theory suggests that it is better to entrust the government to one than many. Because, human nature have it that individuals are selfish and greedy for power and they have no natural inclination to form society. But by pure reason, they came to the realization that it was for their benefit to transit the state of nature where people destroy each other in struggling for wealth, honor and power. Citizens then come together and jointly submit to the rule of a strong autocratic king, who himself is not bound by laws or treaties so as to be free to make decisions which he thinks is appropriate and necessary. For Hobbes, democracy gives much freedom, that will lead to another state of nature, where every man struggles against all. Hobbes argument against democracy, in a sense, pictures the sense of administration in political offices in contemporary ages, how fierce people tend to go while vying for public offices and all sorts of social vices, in Africa, despite civil laws. However, does these justify autocratic governance as pointed out by Hobbes? Will that not be another step to a sort of state of nature, since men will now have to live in fear of their leader who can act arbitrarily? In any case, democracy in Africa, going by Hobbes' position, does not present much to be desired in as much as even in the so-called African democratic set-up, there are no clear-cut distinction between personal rule and democratic rule because the leaders and rulers do not rule democratically in terms of respect for laws but only do what they personally desires even when those things they do and desire are legally and morally incorrect, improper and inappropriate. A case in point is in Nigeria where former President Goodluck Jonathan who had had six years of access to presidential power but who is still thinking of coming to power through other means. The question is what did he forget in the Aso Villa that he is wishing to go and take, even when the laws are against it?

### **9.4. John Locke on Democracy**

A social contract theory was also developed by Locke (1689). His own idea is that human mind is fully open in the beginning such that he is vulnerable, susceptible to harm and selfish too. Therefore, everybody will be better off if they enter a social contract, which is to him a sort of democracy where human rights, natural laws given from God and discovered through reason rules. To Locke, since all human beings are born equal, man ought to be free from any superior power on earth, and not be under the will or legislative authority of man but to be ruled only by natural laws. Therefore, laws and not force must be the basis of government, a government which is not based on law is oppressive. Democracy will be a suitable paradigm for government in the society for Locke because it is a government based on laws that are created after long consideration by appropriate elected representatives of the people and proclaimed in a way that man can be acquainted to them. Citizens, according to Locke, have the right to rebel if the rulers violate their rights, this set a pace for rule of law and checks and balances which we have as parts of the principles of democracy in the state. However, some questions could be raised concerning Locke's position, since Locke's idea of democracy is being built on the foundation of natural law and liberty, what is the nature of these laws? How just and respectable are these laws? Are they in favor of all or just the legislative excluding the good of the masses? If a government which is not based on law is oppressive, how do we describe the ones based on laws but those laws are neglected even by the leaders? Does it mean that man cannot possibly live peaceful without the guidance of any law? In Africa, for example, there are two attitudes to laws that could possibly shock John Locke: one, where laws are made but not obeyed by leaders; two, where

laws are made for the selfish interest of rulers and the political class alone; three, where laws are made to gag the interests of citizens and commoners; and, four, where laws are not made where they ought to be made. Africa seems to be practising democracy in a negative way and in a manner that is opposite to the tenet of democracy. Such manner and practice of democracy runs contrary to how it is practice in other part of the world.

### **9.5. J. S. Mill on Democracy**

Mill (1971) in his work, “*On Liberty*” expresses his support for democracy by advocating liberal democracy, one which citizens participation is key. To him, a desirable form of democracy is not one held just together by contract, but one which is legitimated by public participation in the process of opinion formation and exchanges equality among citizens who have capacity to deliberate on public matters and also creating a process of selecting technically competent individuals for administration. His emphasis on public participation is that persons are related to others and can cause harm to each other directly or indirectly in form of social relations, so, independent decision and plan is not allowed (Urbinati, 2002). The issue of capacity mentioned by Mill is instructive especially when connected to the situation in Africa. To be quite honest, the capacity exuded by most Africans, in specific national situations and state conditions, can be worrisome which explains the low level of political education and culture. This capacity level can leave someone like Mill eternally worried and exceptionally wasted and wearied. If this is the only condition for a successful democracy, then, Africa’s case is forlorn and the prospects for success still a long way to go. In another sense, however, Mill’s view in a way can be interpreted such that it spells out the importance of individual’s vote in modern democracy. Just like the common saying that a vote counts, not participating in voting may lead to keeping an incompetent leader in office which will directly/indirectly affect the whole society. However, how real and productive is the opinion of the majority in face of favoritism and corruption towards the election of competent leaders?

The interesting issues raised and discussed all along presents and provides a healthy introduction and hallowed interpretations of what is theoretically needed in approaching the concrete cases and concerns that the democracy question in Africa presents. Indeed, if nothing has been gained, at least, the conceptual issues about democracy and democratization possess the prolific pedigree and potency in boosting our gaze, gauge and gainful attention on the African democratic dilemma and debate. As a matter of fact, much of the insights offered by mostly western philosophers and their divergent attitudes to the democratic idea are eye-openers in themselves particularly as the problem of democratic consolidation, possibility and prospects of democracy in Africa is creatively interpreted and touched upon. In a way, what may end up being obvious, in the practical sense, when related to Africa, are issues that are already imbued, latent and hidden in the theoretical interpretative analysis and arguments advanced all along. Intentionally, therefore, the connective accuracy flows from one end to the other without any sense of severance or deliberate disconnect. The prevailing analysis is beautified by what follows.

## **10. The Democratic Experience and Experiment in Africa**

In the word of Goren (1995), democracy is not built overnight, it takes many attempts to construct just the foundation but the important thing is to have the opportunity to experience it. This, somewhat explains the state of Africa democracy, it is often assumed that Africa is still on the construction of its democratic system, for it is obvious that its current state is still flawed and not complete. But how long will the construction take?

Although it is believed that democracy is one of the colonial heritage that Africa got from its colonial master (Awolowo, 1977), this is disputable because some scholars have written on the existence of some basic democratic principles in African precolonial society. According to Cliffe (1967), when African countries gained independence, the first in Sub-Saharan Africa began with Ghana in 1957, democratic rights were officially extended to all citizens of the country, as it was being pronounced in the independence constitution. However, a great majority of African nations that started out at independence with one form of democratic government or another, lost it when they came under full blown military dictatorship or some other form of authoritarian or autocratic rule. This led to political instability in African states, the standard of living declined, abortion of hopes nursed by the masses during the period of independence, underdevelopment, deprivation of citizens fundamental rights and liberty etc., of which some of the problems still persist to date. According to Mtinkulu (2015), Africa then, experienced three decades of democratic drought and efforts to agitate for democracy were brutally suppressed. He explains that towards the end of 1980s, only few African states like Botswana, Gambia and Mauritius still had democracies. However, after several transitional approaches, decades of renewed struggle for democracy, change in party system, constitutional amendments, etc, on the sole aim of dismantling all form of non-democratic regime, to give room for establishment of democratic environs that will promote popular participation and public accountability, free from injustice, oppression, mismanagement, corruption and excessive violation and deprivation of rights, there came an era of democratic rebirth of Africa in 1990s. The year 1990, according to

Olowu (1995) was as a watershed in African politics. Then, democracy gained new popularity and wider acceptance as a political system in Africa. However, while some African countries have continually made progress in upholding democracy, in most states, democracy breeds crises such that the political system cannot withstand the strong currents that threaten it. Just as Mtimkulu (2015) notes, even though most African countries insist on practicing democracies, most hold dubious elections, have no respect for rule of law and human rights, and hold regimes that can be described as authoritarian, oppressive and undemocratic.

## **11. The Democracy Question in Africa**

The democratic experiments in Africa have suffered major setback in all spheres. Due to the quality and ineffectiveness of the political system, it has been questioned. Some of the questions raised are as follows.

### ***11.1. Why Democracy in and for Africa?***

Is democracy, as the paradigm of government in Africa, a choice or an imposition? If at all it's a choice, who made the choice and why? Although several answers have been provided, the question remains not totally unraveled. The choice has been said to be made for Africa and supported by Africa by some (Cheeseman, 2019) while some see it not as a choice but an African tradition/lifestyle (Wiredu, 1995). However, if it was a choice, why the choice of democracy when there are alternatives? Why the transition to democracy at first? Is it the case that previously practiced political policies failed or it was inadequate? If the choice was made for Africa, can it be said to be a form of imposition or can Africa support for it against their traditional/precolonial political system be justified? If yes, what could be the aim for such decision? On the other hand, if the practice of democracy in Africa is held to be part of African lifestyle even before the colonial era, why is it the case that its experience has not been one with smooth sailing?

### ***11.2. How Relevant is Democracy in Africa?***

Is democracy the only style of governance that can aid or improve the well-being and welfare of the people in Africa? Is democracy truly founded on the principle and doctrine of welfarism in Africa? Actually, is it the case that democracy alone increases the welfare of the people as Africa concern? These and more are questions that strikes at the center of the debate on the relevance of democracy in Africa. Whether all that Africa need for the well-being of the people is democracy. For Idowu (2005), as a matter of fact, it is important to ask whether democracy is itself a welfarist system of government or that its emphatic attention and importance comes from a different direction other than welfarist agenda. In any case, what is important to investigate is why is democracy thought to be needed in Africa?

### ***11.3. Does Democracy Necessarily means Western Democracy?***

Question of this sort poses the problem of what should be the standard for measuring how well a democratic rule is being practiced. It raises questions like, what should be the main constituent of a democratic order? In what way can we say an organization is democratic? Does it have to be in a particular style? Can any society have its own contracted ways of practicing democracy? How well can democracy be institutionalized? Is democracy strictly western? Can there be a non-western definition for democracy? What actually, distinguishes a non-western from a western style of democracy? What could they have in common? According to Omotola (2009), this type of question must have arisen because of some inherent flaws of western democracy, most especially a general sense in which some societies want less individualism, more traditional social values, economic equality or more consensual and participatory politics but it remains unclear how such desires can account for a distinctive non-western pattern for democracy just like the case of Africa.

### ***11.4. How Democratic is the Democracy in Africa?***

There have been several claims about how flawed democracy has been in Africa. There are several comments like, is this even a democratic rule? According to Mtimkulu (2015), it is evident that in Africa the nature of elections raises alarm whenever they take place, there is authoritarian traits in leaders, opposition parties complaint of election manipulation, there are cases of harassment and rule of law is being ignored, yet Africa claim to operate in a democratic era. The question then is, what, despite all these obvious traces of bad experiment guarantees the democratic title on Africa states?

### ***11.5. The Problem Of Democratic Consolidation in Africa: An Interpretation***

Another pertinent question which Africa faces in its experiment of democracy is the question of why democracy have not been working for Africa like some western and non-western states. What has been the stumbling block for its ineffectiveness? There have been a lot of ideas and opinions on this, some suppose the problem is with the way



democracy is being practiced in Africa, while some hold that the problem is more related to Africa cultural values, ethnicity and attempt to follow the European model of democracy (Cheeseman, 2019).

The following conceptual and theoretical interpretation have been offered in the literature by scholars both within and outside Africa in the bid to explain and describe conditions of impediment to democratic consolidation in Africa. They are:

1. Ethnicity, ethnicism and ethnic pluralism.
2. The nature of African states or the nature of states in Africa.
3. The nature of class [the political class] in Africa.
4. The problem of and issues surrounding citizenship.
5. Violence, crisis and conflicts of epic proportions.
6. Problem of corruption, economic mismanagement and sabotage.
7. The complex and complicated multilingual, multi-ethnic and multicultural textures, structures and networks.
8. Religious and tribal plurality, sensitivity, volatility and intolerance.
9. Recent and current debates concerning the controversy and contest over the universality-particularity [culturality] paradigm.
10. The paradoxical nature, impact and effect of democracy. This side to the problem of democracy was substantially sustained, sanctioned and argued by Larry Diamond.
11. Colonialism and the importation of a strange, alien and foreign jurisprudence, legal ideology and system.
12. The problem of vote buying and money politics [economization and commercialization of votes and voting rights].
13. The problem of political leadership and political followership.
14. The absence of strong ideological base and foundation for existing political parties.
15. The absence of strong political education and the abysmally low level of political culture.
16. The absence of strong democratic institutions and the poor level of institutionalization of public and political life.
17. Gross election riggings and electoral malpractices.
18. Controversial interference and intervention of the judicial branch of government in the democratic processes and election results.
19. Controversial and compromising appointments into key positions with negative democratic consequences.
20. Voter apathy and indifferences.
21. Disenfranchisement.
22. Militarization of Africa.
23. No election or constant failure to organize elections.
24. Humongous remuneration available to political office holders contradicting and compromising the common wealth.
25. The problem of political instability and the perennial and perplexing condition of social, political and economic insecurity.

The above problems and many more reasons than these have formed the interpretative paradigms, parlance and approaches adduced by scholars constituting committed concerns, explanations and descriptions of democratic failure, consolidation and sustenance in Africa. At a very broad level, these problems are conceived and construed as interpretative apparatuses and appurtenances coding and encoding a complete comprehension of democratic quagmire presently parading in phases and turns in the twenty-first century Africa. But whichever way these impediments have been interpreted, another cogent question it raises is, how are and have they been impeding? And, can these impediments be averted? No doubt, these questions are pertinent and requires ample space for sufficient treatment and analysis which is beyond the space provided in this present attempt. Indeed, an essay in theoretical hermeneutics may not sufficiently accommodate such.

### **11.6. Why has Democratic Development been Impossible in Africa?**

According to Lucia (2002), the political development of a state can be said to be dependent on the economic success of the state, this is because several economic problems play a central role in political instability. But, although it may be said that there is a need for economic development before there can be sustainable democracy as resources and material requirement will go a long way in enabling civil liberties, yet it is much expected that the adoption of democracy should escalate economic development and solve all forms of problems related to its deficiency such as poverty, illiteracy, corruption, lack of participation and understanding for politics. However, the deterioration of social welfare and living standards of the people in spite of the vote for democracy in Africa is undermining the confidence of the people in the democratic order towards development, this calls for the question, what are the missing links between democracy and development in Africa, if at all there is any?

### **12. What are the Limitations of Democracy as a Political System in Africa?**

Generally, democracy as a system of government has not been without criticism or limitations. Some scholars had argued that the problem of governance even in some western states stemmed from an excess of democracy, they believe its effective operation usually requires some measures of apathy and non-involvement on the part of some individuals and groups (Barber, 1984; Saul, 1997). However, African condition is certainly more pathetic, even in glaring possibilities of lapses and abuse, Africa continue to support and struggle for democracy (Omotola, 2009). The question is then, to what extent can Africa go in this struggle and sustenance of democracy? When will elements such as participation, competitiveness, openness, civil liberty, tolerance of political opposition, acceptance of election results and all other democratic features inhere African polity? What exactly is hindering the exemplification of these elements?

### **13. The Prospect of Democracy in Africa**

Differences in interpretations and understandings of democracy present different prospects of democracy in the African states. This ranges from it being conceived to be an end in itself or it being a means to an end or even both a means and an end in itself.

#### **13.1. Democracy as an Intrinsic Value**

Democracy as an intrinsic value depicts a conception of democracy as an end in itself. According to Said Adejumbi (1994), such understanding of democracy is majorly concerned with who constitutes the legitimate government and who manage the authority inherent in the state, how they acquire authority and how they exercise it. For him, the concern and main focus here is on whether the regime is authoritarian or representative, therefore, democracy symbolizes a triumph for liberty and equality. Such interpretation of the democratic project in Africa suggests an end of authoritarian, autocratic rule, oppression, imposition or external interference in politics which is supposed to be norms and inherent values of democracy.

#### **13.2. Democracy as an Instrumental Value**

Beyond characterizing democracy using political attributes and criteria, this perspective assumes a causal link between democracy and economic development. It regards modernization as a complex process which demands growth of economic and social life through political system (Sikuka, 2017). This, in relation to African case, according to Adejumbi (1994) in the crusade for democracy can be viewed as a means for material betterment and alleviating poverty and deteriorating standard of living which are attributes of dictatorial regime in Africa.

#### **13.3. Democracy as both Intrinsic and Instrumental In Africa**

Optimally, for Africans, democracy is both an end in itself and more importantly, a means to an end. Human rights, dignity, justice, freedom and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and economic development are to them, achievable only in a democratic environment, which is long desired in Africa (Adejumbi, 1994).

### **14. In What Does The Prospect of Democracy in Africa Lies?**

Although elections have become a regular feature of the democracy in Africa since 1990s, there are still a lot to battle with ensuring adherence to basic tenets of democratic rule (Mtimkulu, 2015). According to Ake (1993), the basis of Africa's democracy movement has become the bitter disappointment of independence and post-independence, especially in respect to the development project. He identifies that, poor leadership have turned the high expectations of people into disappointments, forcing many African leaders to rely more on coercion to rule which creates gaps between the states and the citizens. The reflections of these are too clear in contemporary African states with minor exceptions, no

necessary infrastructures, corruption persists, poverty has greatly intensified and people are in pain. This presupposes that things must go beyond simply holding elections for Africa democracy to prosper, there is an urgent need to seek solutions to authoritarian leadership, for it is evident that their corrupt deeds have condemned most Africans to a life of poverty despite the continent's abundant mineral wealth, which, ordinarily, are meant and expected to promote economic development. In line with Larry Diamond's thought, African societies are ready for a new democratic beginning but they require the right institutional framework to overcome all patterns of odds (Diamond, 1997). How then will they reach this requirement?

There have been several suggestions by scholars, it has been posited by some, that the prospect of democracy in Africa can only be feasible when African cultural values are well recognized in African's experiment of democracy (Ake, 1993; Wiredu, 1995; Eboh, 1990). To this set of scholars, democracy has to be recreated in African context, in a political arrangement which will fit their cultural heritage and realities without sacrificing its values and inherent principles. Contrary to this view is however the notion that democracy is universally valid such that it is applicable cross culturally without alteration. The supporters of this view maintain that liberal democracy, as it is being currently practiced in Africa, need not to be recreated before it prospers in Africa (Jane, 2002; Cilliers, 2005; Fukuyama, 1992). In what then does the Prospect of democracy in Africa lies, democracy as a universal value or democracy as culturally relative?

## 15. Conclusion

From the point of view of theoretical hermeneutics, which shows the basic methodological tool deployed so far, the nitty-gritty of the discussion is all about debating the debates concerning the democracy dilemma, droughts and questions in Africa. As things stands, in the ultimate sense, the answer to that standing and searching question concerning democracy in Africa is either to be wise in terms of western standards of democracy or to the culturally correct, complete and conscious in terms of the way of life that has an African connection without jeopardizing the democratic ferment, feature and form. In relation to this two opposing options, expectations are high, engaging and in need of sincere, strong and serious choice which are expected to lead Africa to a realm where questions no longer abound and abide with respect to a democratic destiny; where answers are chosen and creatively arrived at by dint of processes, procedures and practices that are rationally correct, reasonable in content, ratiocinative in intent and contemplatively correct.

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