

## Liberalism and African Democracy: Complementary or Contradictory Forces Politically Reshaping Africa

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### Abstract

The global choice of democracy as the most sustainable modern style of governance is predicated on its inherent and perceived values as an administrative model. This paper interrogated the essential theoretical trajectories of the conceptualisation and practice of democracy against the backdrop of the pitfalls of electoral violence in the modern, particularly post-colonial, state in Africa. Its major objective was to demonstrate the futility of transcendental normative democratic practice in underdeveloped societies constructed on inequality, deprivation and alienation and sustained by brutal coercion. The central thesis is that electoral violence in Third World countries is mainly the product of the contradiction between traditional egalitarianism and the imposed western liberal democracy. Method of data collection was qualitative and derived from secondary sources. Analytically the study was based on rational and logical argumentation and interpretation of conceptual issues and reports on democratic theory and practice. That the socio-economic setting in the developing countries, particularly in Africa, do not conduce for democratic consolidation, was the inevitable conclusion and accordingly the study recommended rapid economic transformation, social justice and poverty reduction as necessary conditions for effective and sustainable democratisation.

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## **Background to the Study**

Constitutive traditional egalitarian norms, values and their social relations as the foundation of cultural consolidation and democratic practice in its original form is not particularly novel but rather a dynamic lifestyle in Africa. Participatory democracy, in varying forms, as the archetypal communal construct has been the dominant pattern of living naturally associated with Africa. Even where kingdoms and various degrees of feudality coexisted kings and nobles generally recognised and encouraged the widespread practice of subsidiarity within the village localities and collectives. Culturally rooted and effectively participatory the deliberative model of egalitarian democracy has been an integral component of conventional living in African villages and communities (Otite, in Otite ed., 1978, Nwaorgu, 2014).

Embarking on a civilizing mission in Africa and other parts of the Third World as the European and American imperialists did may have produced some positive results measured in terms of modernization (Reyes, 2001), but on the question of democratic practice, has been an exercise in futility or at best a socio-cultural contradiction. Rather than encourage Africans to develop their own egalitarian brand of democracy evolved from their cultural roots and practices the imposition of an alien liberal democracy has been the bane of popular rule in Africa and the Third World (Macpherson, 1972, Rodney, 1972, Chinweizu, 1978, Babu, 1981). Several years of post-colonial experimentation with the western-imposed representative or liberal variant of democracy, has exposed an obvious contradiction that has held governance bound in African social formations.

*Our culture, like any other, was founded on three basic elements: (a) the material element, which includes property relations and technology; (b) the institutional element, which includes customs, rituals, political as well as social institutions; and (c) the element of social values, which includes ethics, religion, literature and art, the latter two reflecting social aspirations and judgements. The intervention of western culture subverted the traditional aspects of our culture, for example, by introducing new relations such as those between town and country (Babu, 1981, 54-55).*

Democratic bankruptcy and its attendant pathologies have been blamed on the African psyche by western scholarship in what Ake (1979) defined as imperialistic social science. It is a mechanism to conceal the failure of liberal democracy in Africa as exemplified by the persistent violent anti-democratic disposition of the new elites. Africa's underdevelopment, which is a foundational factor affecting her democratic report-card, has been blamed on several factors such as geography, slavery, colonialism, ethnicity, visionless leadership, religious conflicts, etc. (Rodney, 1972; Chinweizu, 1978; Nnoli, 1978; Anifowose, 1982; Guest, 2004).

It is necessary to distinguish between force or coercion and violence. Force is "taken to mean legal and legitimate use of violence by a government for the protection of the state, while violence is interpreted as illegal and illegitimate acts carried out by non-governmental individuals and groups" (Anifowose, 1982, 3). However, both are forms of violence since they involve the deployment of weapons to achieve an aim. Politically violence is used by people seeking political power, those holding power to perpetuate themselves in power and those

about to lose power (Anifowose, 1982, 1). Nnoli (1978) posits that political violence is the product of the ethnicization of politics or politicisation of ethnicity and was actually encouraged by the colonialists through the use of divide and rule tactics.

The classical intellectual and philosophical abhorrence for the practice of democracy as a model of socio-political organisation and self-liberation and actualisation persisted even with the emergence of the nation-state from the ruins of the Thirty-Years War and the Peace of Westphalia (Sabine and Thorson, 1973). Made possible by the appropriation of Jean Bodin's concept of supreme authority or "the presence of sovereign power" as the "mark which distinguishes the state from all other groupings" (Sabine and Thorson, 1973, 377) it assumed a special significance in the modern global system from what obtained under the Holy Roman Empire.

*The era of the nation-state had dawned. National boundaries were more clearly defined, national languages replaced the universal Latin, a consciousness of unity developed. Centralised government expanded its control in England under the Tudors, in France under Louis XI, and in Spain under Ferdinand and Charles V. Monarchy was strengthened by civil wars in which the nobles were destroying themselves . . . An awareness of and pride in the secular institutions of one's native country developed (Curtis, 1981, 217-218).*

The composition of the modern state was achieved under the command of absolute rulers across Europe, a hostile setting for the spread and deepening of democratic norms and values. Nonetheless, with the emergence of the nation-state and the drive for the extension of civil and human rights the adoption of conceptualisations and manifestations of popular rule into the modern constitution became a consistently unfolding political reality, instigated mainly by the French Revolution with its declaration of the Rights of Man, as well as the English Bill of Rights (Burke, 1790, 60; Scruton, 2007).

Struggling for liberation from the suffocating womb of the absolutist state the recognition, adoption and development of the democratic model of statecraft has been a tortuous journey as the "thirst for absolute power is the natural disease of monarchy" (Paine, in Foner, 1945, 7). With structurally erected stonewalls against women, slaves, peasants, workers, minorities, races, immigrants, etc. (McCann and McCloskey eds., 2015) victory for democracy and the rights of citizens was achieved not without some nobles and jacks being "left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre and strewn with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses" (Burke, 1790, 60). Democracy, even in its classical form, had its limitations based on constitutional citizenship rights (Appadorai, 2003).

*The Greek democracy as a whole, but especially the Athenian, never embraced all resident adults, nor did it aim, even as an ideal, at the redistribution of wealth. Women were not included under the provisions of the democratic constitution. And the aristocrats and merchant class continued to depend for their wealth on slave and other exploited labour. It was indeed due to the availability of slave labour that the free citizenry was not as oppressed as they might have been (Nkrumah, 2001, 43).*

Democracy was never a ruling class project, let alone an object of globalisation, not until a re-conceptualisation in line with the tenets of capitalism and liberalism had to be intellectually established and empirically embraced (Macpherson, 1972). However, the real challenge is the consolidation of the colonially-imposed liberal democracy in the Third World.

### **The Problem**

Democracy has become the preferred model of political organisation in the modern state since the renaissance, and strengthened further by the European revolutions from the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the “rebirth of the human spirit” and the rights of man and the citizen (Curtis, 1981, 215). With the dawn of the nation-state and the transition from feudalism to capitalism the process of entrenching democratic values in the modern state has been the subject of a persistent struggle against various shades of socio-political discrimination and authoritarianism. Extension of human and democratic rights was part of the revolutionary process that ushered in the modern state and society. The type of modern society that was produced depended on the social category on whose shoulders the responsibility for social transformation rested. Barrington Moore Jr. (1993) identified three major paths to modernity; revolution from above producing the fascist state, revolution from the middle resulting in the emergence of the capitalist state and liberal democracy, while revolution from below gave rise to socialism.

The first problem this paper grapples with is that of conceptualisation based on the claim of impracticability of the original connotation of democracy in large modern territorial states. Second is the problem of a group of countries not only laying exclusive claim to democracy but also embarking on a mission to globalise western liberal democracy as the only viable model of democracy across the world. Third is the inability of democracy to take proper root in Third World countries, particularly Africa, as various forms of electoral misdemeanours consistently impugn their democratic credentials. Electoral violence is antithetical to democratic practice and wherever it occurs disrupts and ruptures the electoral democratic process. Elections are the vehicles for driving the democratic process in modern states. In a civilised society guided by normative values electoral violence should be completely segregated from the very essence of the superior qualities of a democratic society or one striving for social excellence on lofty democratic ideals. Violence and democracy are obvious strange bedfellows that cannot warm each other and provide citizens with the anticipated and cherished social stability and economic prosperity.

### **Aim and Objectives**

This paper aims to interrogate the concept of democracy by linking its original conceptualization with the modern variants or brands, with particular emphasis on the implications of the contradiction between the western-imposed liberal democracy and African traditional egalitarianism. The specific objectives are to:

1. Demonstrate how the re-conceptualisation of democracy to suit the liberal market society has destroyed or compromised its essential qualities.
2. Interrogate the exclusive claim of western countries to the true practice of democracy.
3. Examine the relationship between underdevelopment and democratic practice in

Third World countries.

4. Investigate the implications of the imposition of western democracy on the traditional egalitarian societies of the Third World, particularly Africa.

### Research Questions

1. How has the re-conceptualisation of democracy to suit the liberal market society destroyed or compromised the essential qualities of democracy?
2. What are the implications of the exclusive claim of western countries to the true practice of democracy?
3. What is the relationship between economic underdevelopment and democratic practice?
4. What are the implications of the imposition of western democracy on the traditional egalitarian societies of the Third World, particularly Africa?

### Theoretical Framework

To theoretically provide an adequate framework for this study the theory of underdevelopment by Andre Gunder Frank and a host of other scholars such as Paul Baran (1957), Samir Amin (1976), etc. would be utilised. It states that the condition of underdevelopment in the Third World countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America is the result of the participation of these countries in the global capitalist system for several centuries. It posits further that the greatest economic development in these countries occurs where their ties with the capitalist global system is weakest, rather than the opposite. Frank's theory was designed to counter the conclusions of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) led by Raul Prebisch, which identified two sectors made up of a modern side, which was advanced and innovative, and the other sector that was backward and feudal, arguing that as new capital and technology were introduced development and modernisation would occur, expand and cause the backward sector to shrink.

Frank contrarily argued that rather than encourage development the penetration of capital and technology from the advanced capitalist countries into the Third World countries and their integration into global capitalism, had resulted in what he termed "underdevelopment". Following Baran (1968), he also argued that the Third World countries were not at a stage of development that the advanced capitalist countries had gone through and that they needed encouragement to faithfully go through the same process with the guidance of the advanced countries.

*My thesis is that these capitalist contradictions (i.e. the expropriation of economic surplus from the many and its appropriation by the few, the polarisation of the capitalist system into metropolitan centre and peripheral satellites) and historical development of the capitalist system have generated underdevelopment in the peripheral satellites whose economic surplus was expropriated, while generating economic development in the metropolitan centres which appropriate that surplus – and, further, that this process still continues (Frank, cited by Reece, 1983, 13).*

Under development in Third World countries has created a variety of distortions, which are economic, political, social, cultural, spatial, etc. It is this paper's contention that electoral



violence and other forms of undemocratic political manifestations in Third World countries are the products of underdevelopment arising from the exploitation and transfer of their limited resources to the advanced capitalist countries of Europe and America. When the economy is distorted and poverty prevails politics cannot be decent and the process of democratization would wobble.

### **Evolution of the Concept of Democracy**

Wearing the toga of an exclusive club with an urgent mandate imposed on all modern states democratic hegemony has obligated even the most authoritarian states to lay a claim to democratization, no matter how feebly articulated and with the faintest of empirical evidence. Such is the urgency and compulsion with which developing countries, with doubtful credentials and desecrated foundations, are required to catch up with the west in democratic practice. Ake (2008) has raised a pertinent question on the “feasibility of democracy in Africa” and perhaps the rest of the developing countries with authoritarian structures effectively entrenched by the same West through the instrumentality of colonial rule.

*The subject of democracy has become severely muddled because of the way the rhetoric surrounding it has been used in recent years. There is, increasingly, an oddly confused dichotomy between those who want to 'impose' democracy on countries in the non-Western world (in these countries' 'own interest', of course) and those who are opposed to such 'imposition' (because of the respect for the countries' 'own ways'). But the entire language of 'imposition', used by both sides, is extraordinarily inappropriate since it makes the implicit assumption that democracy belongs exclusively to the West, taking it to be a quintessentially 'Western' idea which has originated and flourished only in the West (Sen, 2009, 322).*

In the post-absolutist era and emerging from the ruins of feudalism democracy was confronted with two broad challenges in the western capitalist societies, (1) a reconceptualization to fit into the needs of an expansive modern territorial state, and (2) a redefinition to provide the framework for leadership succession as well as governance in an individualistic, atomised, market-driven, competitive and self-interested society. The first produced the idea of representation by sheer size of the modern state, while the second entrenched popular rule through limited and one-sided participation. The argument is that given the large size of the modern state communal assembly and deliberative decision making are no longer feasible, therefore requiring the periodic election of a tiny minority for governmental duty on a representative basis.

On the other hand, to complement and compensate for the alienation of the majority from the governance process a sense of popular rule or control through the electoral process as a basis for controlling the democratic mandate had to be introduced and enforced. However, with economic disempowerment and increasing income disparities the spectacles of frustration on the part of the exploited classes remain a huge dent on the image of liberal democracy notwithstanding the bourgeois propaganda. Fukuyama, a foremost liberal scholar:

*concedes that liberal democracies are doubtless plagued by a host of problems like unemployment, pollution, drugs, crime and the like, that the economic inequality*

*brought about by capitalism ipso facto implies unequal recognition; and most remarkably, that major social inequalities will remain even in the most perfect of liberal societies” (Miliband, in Diamond & Plattner eds. 1993, 113).*

It is to the eternal credit of objectivity for some western scholars to admit the pathologies of liberal democracy as opposed to the familiar practice of sweeping every negativity under the carpet and discrediting other brands of democracy. Idealising the liberal model, Tocqueville (cited in Hayek, 2006, 25) insists that “democracy extends the sphere of individual freedom, socialism restricts it. Democracy attaches all possible value to each man; socialism makes each man a mere agent, a mere number. Democracy and socialism have nothing in common but one word: equality. But notice the difference: while democracy seeks equality in liberty, socialism seeks equality in restraint and servitude”. Accordingly, Hayek (2006, 32) declares that “democratic socialism, the great utopia of the last few generations, is . . . unachievable”.

Recently, liberal scholars have been quick in pointing to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and other East-European socialist states as evidence of the superiority of western liberal democracy and capitalism over whatever socialism represents. Berger (in Diamond and Plattner eds. 1993, 1-10) declares emphatically that “there has been no case of political democracy that has not been a market economy”, and that in actual fact “there has been no case of democratic socialism”. In response Ake (in Diamond and Plattner eds. 1993, 26-30) draws attention to “the extraordinary rise of the Soviet Union from a backward feudal country to superpower status, as well as the capitalist encirclement”, a well organised and sponsored network of hostility and media propaganda that ensured its capitulation, raising the pertinent question whether the collapse would have occurred in a less hostile but rather friendly and supportive environment.

Arguing further he established that the challenge of socialism had actually nudged capitalism to redefine itself in various spheres and in the process recorded the recent gains and achievements being witnessed. It is equally doubtful if the transition from socialism to political liberalism and capitalistic development in Eastern Europe has been so fantastically successful. In other words, has liberal capitalism actually and firmly established itself as the “last man and the end of history”? (Fukuyama, 1992). Berger's position, like (Diamond, 2008) is that democracy or democratisation naturally accompanies capitalistic economic success, thus blaming the crisis of democratisation in the Third World and Eastern Europe on the limited success of the market economic model, much like blaming the cure for the disease.

Furthermore, there is also the familiar preoccupation of western scholarship to conflate democracy with liberalism and capitalism while demonising socialism. This line of thinking is not only self-contradictory but also unhelpful in explaining the developmental feats of the Asian Tigers under authoritarian regimes before democratising.

*It leads them to embrace a false, albeit popular, conception regarding capitalist development and democracy in South Korea, Taiwan and Japan. There's no problem, goes this line of argument, in explaining how these countries failed at first to be democratic, or how once having achieved capitalist development, they had to*

*become democratic: At the beginning of their industrialization, they were not capitalist systems . . . As they evolved into capitalist systems proper, they became ipso facto liberal democracies, for what is liberal democracy if not the political correlate of capitalist production? (Ake, in Diamond & Plattner eds. 1993, 26-30).*

Despite these bourgeois theoretical and ideological shenanigans, Ake (in Diamond and Plattner eds. 1993, 26-30) insists that “the meaning of democracy is perfectly clear. For a political concept, it is uncharacteristically precise. Democracy means popular power, rule by the *demos*”, rather than representation. One key aspect of democratic practice that is conveniently ignored by western scholars is the idea of participation, not in the sense of voting but rather the possibility of being voted for to hold a public office in a lifetime.

*The basis of a democratic state is liberty . . . the great end of every democracy. One principle of liberty is for all to rule and be ruled in turn, and indeed democratic justice is the application of numerical not proportionate equality; whence it follows that the majority must be supreme, and that whatever the majority approve must be the end and the just. Every citizen, it is said, must have equality, and therefore in a democracy the poor have more power than the rich, because there are more of them, and the will of the majority is supreme (Aristotle, 1999, 189).*

In his polemic against Berger and Kim, Ake (in Diamond and Plattner eds. 1993, pp. 26-30) argued that they “both came down on the side of conventional wisdom, arguing that capitalism is necessary for democracy, and that only capitalist systems can be democratic; at the same time, they acknowledge that capitalist systems are not necessarily democratic, especially in earlier stages of their development, when authoritarian rule appears to be an asset”. Consequently, Ake (p. 28) advises that democracy be better “conceived of as a complex range of possibilities of form and content”. It is only in so doing that it would be easier to see democratic possibilities in a broader range of productive systems. This approach enabled Macpherson (1972) to distinguish between liberal, socialist and Third World democracies with liberalism as the weakest form of democracy.

### **Variants of Democracy**

Sen (2009, p. 321) has utilised the metaphor of “squirting ink-clouds” in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, to masterfully demonstrate democracy's ability to mislead and insists that the practice of democracy is not confined to the West but has for long thrived in ancient India, even before Athens, and still persists currently. Okoko and Ogali (2009, 1-38) insist that democracy is “ate moral and aspatial”. Western liberalism is actually squirting ink-clouds on the rest of the world.

*While Athens certainly has an excellent record in public discussion, open deliberation also flourished in several other ancient civilizations, sometimes spectacularly so; for example, some of the earliest open general meetings aimed specifically at settling disputes between different points of view, on social and religious matters, took place in India in the so-called Buddhist 'councils', where adherents of different points of view got together to argue out their differences, beginning in the sixth century BC (Sen, 2009, 331).*



It goes to show that the claim of originality and superiority of western liberal democracy, with its emphasis on elections or narrow political democracy, is ideologically tainted and fundamentally flawed. Miliband (in Diamond and Plattner eds. 1993, 115) describes elections in liberal democracies, particularly the dependent ones, as “a legitimizing ritual, a rite by which the populace renewed their consent to an oligarchical power structure”. It has been argued that democracy has transcended the limited western conceptualisation or the more formal “view of democracy which characterizes it mainly in terms of elections and ballots, rather than in the broader perspective of government by discussion (Sen, 2009, 324).

The idea of government by deliberation is interactive, generally free and effectively participatory. He argues further that “in contemporary political philosophy, the understanding of democracy has broadened vastly, so that democracy is no longer seen just in terms of the demands for *public balloting*, but much more capaciously, in terms of what John Rawls calls the exercise of public reason” (Sen, 2009, 324; Rawls, 1993). This perspective raises questions of justice, fairness and equality, particularly in the economic sphere without which political freedom and democratic values would be vacuous and meaningless. Capitalism, the driving force behind liberal democracy has achieved tremendous progress through the constant revolutionization of technology and material production, acknowledged even by Marx and Engels (1977).

However, despite their “immense resources, capitalist societies are marked by appalling poverty and unemployment, inferior collective services, insecurity, illiteracy, and generally reactionary politics. In other words, capitalism produces a social order in which democracy, even in its shoddy capitalist version, is under permanent threat of erosion” (Miliband, in Diamond and Plattner eds. 1993, 116). If bourgeois democracy in its purest form in the industrialized setting could be so indicted what obtains in the peripheral, dependent and underdeveloped societies of the Third World is a perennial disaster. Giddens (1978, 157) insists on economic democracy and “stability rather than welfare and social security”.

An obvious connection between the idea of justice and the practice of democracy has been established, “since in contemporary political philosophy the view that democracy is best seen as government by discussion has gained widespread support” (Sen, 2009, p. 324). The emphasis on periodic elections as the fundamental basis of democracy is a vision generally shared by western liberal scholars. There is a general belief that these elections are open, free and fair. According to Key Jr., (1955, 3-18) effective choice in open, free and fair elections is the defining feature of liberal democracy, arguing that:

*Perhaps the basic differentiating characteristic of democratic order consists in the expression of effective choice by the mass of the people in elections. The electorate occupies, at least in the mystique of such orders, the position of the principal organ of governance; it acts through elections. An election itself is a formal act of collective decision that occurs in a stream of connected antecedent and subsequent behaviour.*

Macpherson (1974, 5), refuses to see the usefulness of theoretically and ideologically deviating from the original meaning of democracy as “rule by the common people, the

plebeians. It was very much a class affair: it meant the sway of the lowest and largest class. That is why it was feared and rejected by men of learning, men of substance, men who valued civilized ways of life". First, it is necessary to return to the original conceptualization of democracy as rule by the majority poor and here is where liberal, capitalist democracy meets its Waterloo as a system that concentrates stupendous wealth in the hands of the few while the majority wallows in poverty. It is a system that systematically dehumanizes and disempowers the majority politically and economically by transferring the wealth produced by the working majority to their capitalist employers and thereby incapacitates them in terms of political decision making. Elections under capitalism are so financially demanding – campaign funds-raising, publicity, logistics, security, etc. - that the workers can ill afford and consequently limited to just casting the vote, which is not the true definition of democracy. It raises the fundamental question whether a society characterized by deep and wide class distinctions could actually be democratic.

According to Macpherson (1974, 3) democracy “used to be a bad word . . . Then, within fifty years, democracy became a good thing”, and wars were fought in defence of democracy or to make the world safe for democracy, and even became the single most prominent criterion for admission into the comity of civilized nations and even for qualification to benefit for several incentives such as trade, finance, credit, debt forgiveness, investment, etc. How did this happen? The meaning of democracy was changed from popular democracy or rule by the poor majority to rule by an elected few or minority.

*In our Western societies the democratic franchise was not installed until after the liberal society and the liberal state were firmly established. Democracy came as a top dressing. It had to accommodate itself to the soil that had already been prepared by the cooperation of the competitive, individualist, market society, and by the operation of the liberal state which served that society through a system of freely competing though not democratic political parties. It was the liberal state that was democratized, and in the process, democracy was liberalized (Macpherson, 1974, 5).*

This is how democracy became not just a cherished idea but actually a pearl of great price and accordingly appropriated by the West to the exclusion of every other type of society. Purely liberal concepts had to be embedded in democracy as defining criteria. For instance, K. C. Wheare (cited by Jinadu, in Akinyemi et al, eds. 1980, 21), stipulated criteria such as periodic elections, two- or multi-party system, free elections, “responsible opposition” and “free government” and even hastily equated democracy with federalism. These criteria effectively exclude both the socialist states and the Afro-Asian egalitarian societies. Consequently, Macpherson identifies three variants of democracy with their distinct strengths and weaknesses, non-liberal democracy: the communist variant; the non-liberal democracy: the underdeveloped or Third World variant and liberal democracy. Comparatively, between these three variants liberal democracy has turned out to be the weakest because of its power structure that leverages on the few, whereas the communist variant transfers power to the majority working class while the Third World's claim to democracy is rooted in their natural egalitarian tradition of the village assembly and the classless philosophy of African socialism

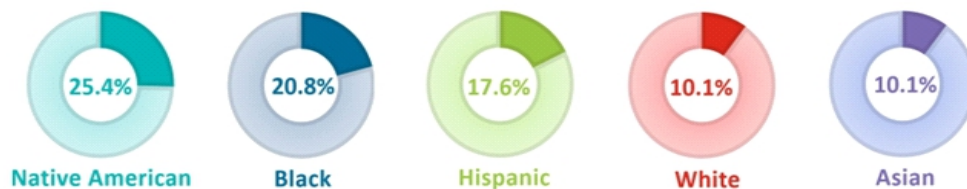
espoused through Kwame Nkrumah's Consciencism, Julius Nyerere's *Ujamaa* and Kenneth Kaunda's Humanism (Babu, 1981).

In the West, liberal society had to liberalise democracy in the same way as liberalism was democratised. In other words, western liberal culture was adorned with the toga, not of the real democracy but rather a form of democracy modified to conveniently fit into liberal society. Consequently, western democracy contains within itself all the ethical deficiencies of liberal society such as class distinctions, wealth concentration, exploitation, alienation, commodity fetishisation, labour commodification (Marx, 1951), crime, discrimination, racism, poverty, etc.

In the United States, the bastion of modern liberal democracy, a national crisis of homelessness has drawn global attention. In the State of California about 130,000 people are homeless, both sheltered and unsheltered (See Chart 2 below). Chart 1 depicts an average national poverty rate of about 15% and various degrees of ethnic differences in poverty affliction, with 10.1% among whites and native Americans having the worst situation of 25.4% followed by blacks at 20.8%. Such citizens also troop out to cast their ballot in the name of freedom, equality and civil rights. These and other spectacles of poverty and misery have drilled a deep hole in the conscience of Western liberal democracy.

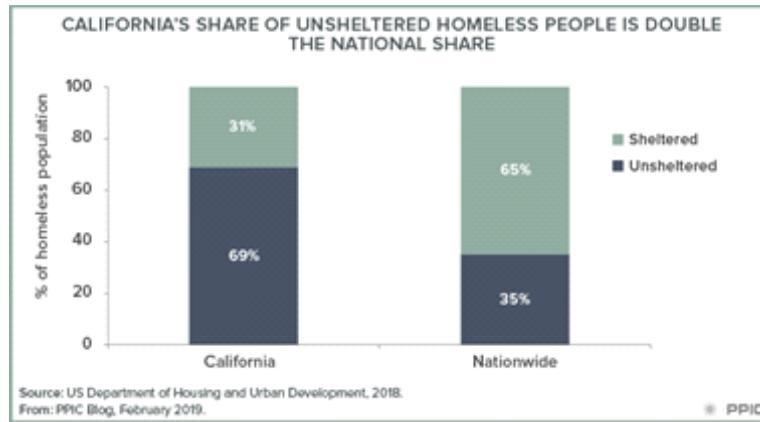
According to 2018 US Census Data (displayed in Chart 1), the highest poverty rate by race is found among Native Americans (25.4%), with Blacks (20.8%) having the second highest poverty rate, and Hispanics (of any race) having the third highest poverty rate (17.6%). Whites had a poverty rate of 10.1%, while Asians had a poverty rate at 10.1%.

**Chart 1:** Poverty by ethnicity in USA



**Source:** 2019, US Census Bureau (p. 18-19).

**Chart 2:** Homelessness nationwide and California, USA 2019



**Source:** Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) February 19, 2019

Such conditions eloquently explain Rousseau's rejection of the idea of representation, insisting that citizens put themselves into slavery by electing representatives to take decisions and actions on their behalf.

*Once public service ceases to be the chief business of the citizens, and they prefer to serve with their wallet rather than with their person, the state is already near its ruin. Is it necessary to match off to battle? They pay mercenary troops and stay at home. Is it necessary to go the council? They name deputies and stay at home. By dint of laziness and money, they finally have soldiers to enslave the country and representatives to sell it... Give money and soon you will be in chains (Rousseau, in 1987, 197).*

Shackled citizens are everywhere, in all countries, celebrating their condition of servitude in the name of democracy and patriotism. Representation, unknown to many, is actually the broad road to slavery in the modern state. It brings to the fore the central issue whether “balloting alone can be thoroughly inadequate on its own, as is abundantly illustrated by the astounding electoral victories of ruling tyrannies in authoritarian regimes in the past as well as those in the present, for example in today's North Korea” (Sen, 2009, 327), and in Africa Paul Biya of Cameroon, Museveni of Uganda, Dos Santos of Angola, Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, etc. These have perpetuated themselves in power through elections. Consequently, elections per se are grossly inadequate for defining democracy.

### **Underdevelopment and Third World Democracy**

The mode of “articulation of the underdeveloped countries with the world economic system results in a transfer of resources from the periphery to the centre and/or this articulation gives rise to the various blocking mechanisms which hold back or distort the economies of the periphery, thereby preventing an allocation of resources which will produce economic growth” (Roxborough, 1981, 63). Imperialistically conditioned transfer of resources from the peripheral states to the developed countries through the multinational corporations, unfair

trade relations and the debt trap have combined to create and reinforce underdevelopment in Third World countries with far-reaching consequences (McCann and McCloskey eds. 2015).

*Economic dependence may be defined as a lack of capacity to manipulate the operative elements of an economic system. Such a situation is characterized by an absence of inter-dependence between the economic functions of a system. This lack of interdependence implies that the system has no internal dynamic which would enable it to function as independent, autonomous entity (Roxborough, 1981, 50).*

The spectacles of underdevelopment, resulting from economic dependence, in Third World countries manifest as corruption, poverty, low income, unemployment, low productivity, low technological advancement, poor infrastructure, illiteracy, disease, crime, insurgency, etc. Low economic productive base has resulted in politics being viewed and utilized as an investment opportunity. In Third World countries, particularly Africa, politics has become the most viable source of investment through which public funds are looted (Williams, 1980, 96). Consequently, the desperation for political power motivates politicians to resort to various unethical mechanisms, including violence, effectively exploiting ethnicity, religion, cultism and other divisive forces.

Underdevelopment constitutes the primary source of electoral violence in Third World countries and directly distorts democratic practice and the process of democratisation. It's almost impossible for democracy to take root and thrive under such conditions Ake, 2008). Ironically the champions of capitalism and liberal democracy are also directly responsible for the underdevelopment of Third World countries and by implication also place obstacles to the growth of democracy. While independent-minded patriotic leaders that endeared themselves to their people with people-oriented governance, policies and strategies, were demonized, antagonized, stigmatized and declared undemocratic and accordingly destroyed in several mysterious ways by the West, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea, Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, Sylvanus Olympio of Togo, Murtala Mohammed of Nigeria, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Salvador Allende of Chile, Fidel Castro of Cuba, etc. the worst tyrannical leaders that impoverished their people are being protected and encouraged provided western plundering of the resources of African is ignored.

### **African Traditional Egalitarianism and Modern Democracy**

Huntington's (1996) conceptualisation of the clash of civilizations manifests stoically in the contemporary conditions in the African states where liberal democratic principles imposed during colonial rule float like oil on the rivers of African indigenous egalitarianism. African and west-European civilisations, especially with one claiming superiority and holding the other in utter contempt can produce no functional system to be put in practice.

*The African society is a system of mutually benefitting reciprocities. Society, to the African, exists for the good of all its members in a system of role reinforcements. This involves myriad reciprocal relationships . . . There is a very close link between the principle of exchange and reciprocity and that of morality. There is a high moral tone closing to a religion as part of the African system of multiplex reciprocities. Even*



*economic exchanges have a social context and a moral tone. This morality and religion in African system of multidirectional reciprocities is reinforced by a system of mutual benefits, direct or indirect, in the context of a brotherhood ideology (Otite, in Otite ed. 1978, 10).*

This effectively summarises the African egalitarian democratic system made up of mutually beneficial reciprocities with emphasis on morality. Concepts of individualism, exploitation, ostentation, greed, corruption, etc. are all strange, contradictory and therefore in constant conflict with the African civilisation. Perhaps the most perniciously destructive cankerworm that colonialism introduced to Africa is not just money, as various forms of traditional measures of value and store of value pre-existed, but the love or even worship of it. Even the Bible identified the love of money as “the root of all evil”. For Mamadou Dia (cited in Hensbroak, 1998, 112)

*African Socialist structures would be built on quite different premises from those of the West. Born to affirm a system of values unrelated to the value of money, the non-Western civilizations of Asia and Africa could only produce relations in which monetary considerations always remain secondary.*

Nothing has eroded the ethical content of African social relations and egalitarian values than the love or worship of money introduced into Africa through colonialism. In traditional Africa monetary or gratificatory considerations in human relations have historically been secondary, contrary to the Western culture of idolising money in the liberal market and contractual obligations. Engels (1978, 201) called money the “commodity of commodities” . . . which holds all other commodities hidden in itself, the magic instrument which can change at will into everything desirable and desired”.

Such is the spectacular spell that money places on human society, especially when all kinds of criminality, such as slavery, murder, abductions, drug peddling, human trafficking, betrayal, environmental degradation, etc. are so closely associated with its acquisition. Engels (1978, 131) argued that the “gentile constitution is absolutely irreconcilable with money economy”. Since capitalism thrives on self-interest or “self-love” (Smith, 2012, 19), unethical methods are usually adopted in the process of financial accumulation with little or no consideration for the obvious negative effects on the exploited social classes and even the entire society insidiously.

The idolisation of money is a legacy of colonial rule in Africa and the Third World and perhaps constitutes the greatest threat to the development of democracy in Third World countries. Such illicit disposition to money is antithetical to African egalitarian culture. Nationalist leaders in Africa failed to adapt this cultural or ideological framework to fashion a functional political system for contemporary post-colonial societies. In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela describes how impressed and influenced he was, as a young boy, by seeing the democratic nature of the proceedings of the local meetings that were held in the regent's house in Mqhekezweni:

*Everyone who wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. There may have been a hierarchy of importance among the speakers, but everyone was heard, chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and labourer . . . The foundation of self-government was that all men were free to voice their opinions and equal in their value as citizens (Mandela, 1994, 21).*

The further evolution and development of this primaeval political culture into a peculiar model of democracy for contemporary Africa was stultified by the imposition of western liberal culture and the hypocrisy and subservience of African nationalist leaders. Liberal democracy had evolved pristinely out of the roots and womb of western Christianized liberal culture while the indigenous African political model was suppressed. "In our Western societies the democratic franchise was not installed until after the liberal society and the liberal state were firmly established" (Macpherson, 1972, 5). After the liberal market society had been established "democracy came as a top dressing". It was a society characterised by individualism, choice, competition, atomisation, impersonal mechanistic relations in the open market space. In the process the "liberal state was democratised" and "capitalism liberalised". It was a progressive, primaeval and harmonious blend of culture and socio-political forces and institutions.

Consequently, where this basic harmony in its process of evolution is castrated or spurned and a foreign system superimposed over and above it as Africa experienced under colonial rule, crises would be the inevitable result. "B. R. Ambedkar, who chaired the drafting committee that wrote up the new Indian constitution for adoption by the Constituent Assembly shortly after Indian independence in 1947, wrote fairly extensively on the relevance, if any, of India's ancient experiences in local democracy for the design of a large democracy for the whole of modern India" (Sen, 2009, 330). Little wonder that a sustainable democratic system is in place and still operates unfettered in India, but no such consideration was given the original and fundamental egalitarian culture in Africa. Nationalist leaders in Africa were all too eager to inherit the offices and positions within the "over-developed" post-colonial state (Alavi, NLR, 1/74, July-August, 1972) being vacated by the colonial administrators with little or no modification. The "state must rumble and crumble" where the squares are rendered "inactive" (Nwaorgu, 2014, p. 14). In the indigenous Third World context the square:

*Is a free, large and sacred place of a community that serves many a purpose from the mundane . . . to the spiritual. It is an arena where tough issues are deliberated upon, where kings are crowned or dethroned, where warriors are sent off for a bloody campaign or received after the campaign. It is a place of judgment, a place for the people and created by the people. The New Yam Festival, intra and inter community wrestling matches, the banishing of anyone that had offended the gods of the land or the public repudiation of a witch or wizard, would never be done at a better place than at the village square (Nwaorgu, 2014, 17).*

Because liberal democracy is not properly seated on the Third World soil politicians and policy makers execute decisions that completely estrange the people whose input is never taken into

cognisance. What Ekekwe (2015, 33) termed “deformed capitalism” in Third World countries could only produce a deformed democracy, which would accordingly breed violence. From the perspective of this paper democratic consolidation is predicated on certain fundamental principles, which basically determine democratic success. Democracy should be viewed as an integral and therefore inalienable component of culture, the very foundation of organic society, a way of life that is home grown, custom-based and value-driven, as well as being integrated and articulated with other dimensions of the socio-cultural totality. Where this is not the case as being witnessed in various parts of the world system failure and violence would be the inevitable result.

*Democracy has recently been overthrown or gradually stifled in a number of key states, including Nigeria, Russia, Thailand, Venezuela, and, most recently, Bangladesh and the Philippines. In December 2007, electoral fraud in Kenya delivered another abrupt and violent setback. At the same time, most newcomers to the democratic club (and some long-standing members) have performed poorly. Even in many of the countries seen as success stories, such as Chile, Ghana, Poland, and South Africa, there are serious problems of governance and deep pockets of disaffection. In South Asia, where democracy once predominated, India is now surrounded by politically unstable, undemocratic states. And aspirations for democratic progress have been thwarted everywhere in the Arab world (Diamond, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2008).*

What Diamond terms “democratic rollback or recession” effectively captures all the poignancy of the Third World democratic pathology, it is an obvious struggle and contradiction, a contest for power and predomination between a rejected foundation and an imposed wobbly superstructure. Whatever gains that are recorded over a period, after receiving western applause and admission into the democratic club, only come crashing as the state rumbles thunderously from the pressure of unresolved social flatulence. Democracy is pathetically discredited by a consistent trend in electoral violence. Though its normative values have been broadly accepted and are accordingly exercising political hegemony across the world as almost all contemporary states claim to be practising it with contextual peculiarities and variations, the concealed putrescence in the social fabric occasionally manifests for all to see and realise that all is not well.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing this paper has achieved the stated objectives bordering on the re-conceptualisation of democracy that has compromised its essential qualities, the exclusive claim of western countries to the true practice of democracy proved to be an error, the relationship between underdevelopment and democratic practice in Third World countries being inverse, and the implications of the imposition of western democracy on the traditional egalitarian societies of the Third World, particularly Africa becoming a hindrance. Accordingly, the paper concludes that:

1. With good leadership and clear vision sustainable democratic practice in Third World countries is possible but not without very serious challenges which hinder well-ordered and disciplined politics (Ekekwe, 2015; Ndu, 2016).

2. The exclusive claim of the West over democracy and even taking steps to impose it on developing countries has created more problems.
3. Democracy thrives better when it indigenously evolves from the established culture of the people. In Africa democracy has not been made to grow bottom-up rather than the reverse.
4. Africans, and even the rest of the Third World countries have their own history of indigenous democratic practice which have not been developed to provide the framework for evolving a modern democratic culture.
5. Modern representative democracy is highly oppressive, selective and exclusionary. Political violence is the spark from the clash of liberal democracy and African egalitarianism as the products of different civilisations.

### **Recommendations**

This paper presents the following recommendations:

1. Third World countries should develop their own brand of democracy rooted in their own indigenous culture and practise it passionately and patriotically.
2. Western liberal democracy that was imposed during colonial rule should be modified to suit the indigenous or local conditions. The reason is to make it more participatory and inclusive.
3. Politics should be made less attractive to enable citizens with a patriotic spirit to participate and assume leadership positions. It should not be viewed and used as an instrument for self-aggrandizement.

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