COLONISATION, DECOLONISATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF ENGENDERING AN AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

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ABSTRACT
During colonialism, many African countries had their territories conquered and subdued by Europe for the primary purpose of exploring, exploiting and establishing economic buffer zone in Africa. To achieve this, the colonialists introduced and substituted their political and administrative structures for the pre-colonial indigenous African political/administrative structures. This resulted in the adoption of the European model of liberal democracy. The paper discusses the ontology of Africa's pre-colonial indigenous political system, European colonialism and its attendant adverse effects on the post-colonial African state. The paper rues the aping of Western democratic theory by former African colonies as primarily responsible for the pervasive political crises across Africa. The paper thus recommends a reversion to and the renovation of the pre-colonial African indigenous political institutions as a pathway to engendering an identity for Africa's democracy. Not a total rejection of the western model of democracy and not a total acceptance of the pre-colonial political institution but a somewhat adoption of a middle course suitable for a typical African socio-cultural milieu.

Introduction

Post colonial Africa has continued to experience a unidirectional movement towards the Western version of democracy since independence. This trend has no doubt culminated in a profound attempt to substitute the pre-colonial indigenous African democratic values with the pervasive neo-liberal democratic tradition. This rapid erasure of the pre-colonial African indigenous democratic values and the dramatic embrace of and inclination towards the Western democratic culture has been a major source of serial political crisis across the African continent. Apparently, the patronage for Western political culture by the post-colonial African state is in conflict with the pre-colonial Africa's political heritage and democratic values. Overtime, this rather obscure conflict has gradually given way to vintage and manifest conflicts across Africa. The fusion of the Western liberal democracy and Africa's autocratic tradition has engendered inexorable crisis blowing across the African continent; from Kenya to the Arab countries of Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and down to Ivory Coast, Benin Republic, Zimbabwe, etc.

With regard to the foregoing, there have been scholarly tendencies for post-colonial Africa to re-examine inherited western democratic values and practices. These tendencies have stimulated renewed interest in the pre-colonial indigenous political institutions. This renewed interest is ostensibly due to the failure of the inherited formal political structures

in terms of its resilience, effectiveness and reliability in the provision of required goods and services to the African peoples (Olowu and Erero, 1997)

The services provided by agencies under modern democratic institutions have declined sharply in quality and quantity. According to Olowu and Erero (1997), institutions operating under modern democratic structures are no longer responsible for the public services enjoyed by the citizens in the urban and rural areas of Nigeria. Such services are provided by a variety of non-governmental agencies, some of which are indigenous (e.g. townships, community-based action groups etc.) but some of which are not (e.g. religious and philanthropic agencies, donor organs etc.)

Pre-colonial African traditional institutions have also become more attractive due to its high moral values and strong ethical base. Studies have shown that the issue of morality is more commonly profound and observed among indigenous population and communities in Africa. This belief is derived from the perspective that the values and principles of African morality are founded on the character and integrity of the African tradition rather than on mere religion. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010).

This paper undertakes an eclectic appraisal of the post-colonial political institution and the modern and western model of democracy on one hand; and the pre-colonial indigenous political institutions among African societies on the other hand. The juxtaposition of these two models of political structures is for the purpose of reviving and renovating the pre-colonial political institutions for the African society. This approach is premised on the fact that many scholarships work either advocated a total abrogation of the colonial political institution and/or a total acceptance of the pre-colonial political institution. However, the tendencies in this study is an overhaul and rejig of both the pre-colonial and the colonial political structures to make it suitable for the post-colonial African state.

Pre-Colonial Administrations in Africa: a Historical Perspective

This section discusses the indigenous political institutions in some African states before the colonial administrations but with copious references to Nigeria. Many African countries share similarities and dissimilarities in their pre-colonial administrations. However, there seems to be some consensus that most African countries had stable indigenous political institutions before colonialism. For example, history has it that most former colonial colonies, particularly former British colonies had stable and viable indigenous political institutions before the introduction of colonial administration.

The pre-colonial political institutions in Sierra Leone were dominated by the Atlantic sub-family made up of the Bulom and the Sherbro tribes. To the South east of Sierra Leone, we had the Mende tribe who came as settlers and hunters but later organised into war chiefdoms. The North of Sierra Leone were the Mandinka tribes, the Susus, the Limbas, the Konos and the Temenes. The Temnes conquered the land and enslaved the Susus, Limbas and the Lokos and created a strong and viable state which derived its prosperity from the slave trade with Europeans. The Susus later revolted against the Temnes and established their own state (Anene, 1966).

The coast belt of what is today Liberia and Ivory Coast use to be the home of many groups belonging to the Atlantic sub-family. The most popular of the Atlantic sub-family was the Kru tribe which could not integrate properly with its neighbours, the Vai, the Bassa and the Bakwe. However, the authority in the Atlantic sub-family was held by the elders representing family segments which claimed a common ancestry (Anene, 1966).

In Ghana, the pre-colonial indigenous institution was made up of mainly the Akan group of peoples which consisted of the Fante and the Asante. Incidentally, there were both the Fante and Asante Confederacies. While the Fante Confederacy bore allegiance to the Asantehene, the Asante form of government epitomized feudalism, with a hierarchy of chiefs owing various degrees of allegiance and obligation; an administrative system of government akin to indirect rule system, where tributary chiefs were empowered to rule their own peoples, sometimes under the supervision of resident representatives of the Asantehene. This arrangement served as a system of checks and balances, a replica of what obtained in pre-colonial Oyo Empire (Brown, 1996).

Unlike what we have in other parts of Africa, it has been relatively difficult trying to determine

when colonialism actually started in countries of North East Africa and in the Maghreb. The history of pre-colonial administration of the countries in the Maghreb was fraught with series of expansionist tendencies, foreign incursions and foreign military expeditions. Before the invasion of the Ottoman Turks in 1517, Egypt has been under the rulership of the Mamluks. The French occupied Egypt after Napoleon led a military expedition to crush the Mamluks in 1798. However, French occupation of Egypt came to an end when the British intervened and combined forces with the Ottoman Sultan to compel the withdrawal of French from Egypt (Al-Hajj, 1966).

In the Sudan, we had North Sudan and South Sudan. North Sudan was mainly arabized in culture and outlook, consisted mostly of Muslims and of Arab descent, while South Sudan was predominantly non-Muslims. The pre-colonial indigenous political institution in Sudan was predominantly under the firm control of the Ja'ali dynasty which was the major ruling group. This was in addition to the arabized Nubia ethnic group who were mainly sedentaries of the main Nile. However, virtually every notable group in the Sudan is intrinsically linked to the Ja'ali. There also existed the royal family of Taquali, a small Muslim state in the pagan Nuba Mountains which derived its origin from the marriage of a Ja'ali holy man to an indigenous princess. Invariably, the various ruling groups basically have claimed a Ja'ali ancestry (Holt, 1976).

Specifically speaking about Nigeria, Olowu and Erero (1997), in their work on *Governance of Nigeria's villages and cities through indigenous institutions* identified three types of indigenous institutions in Nigeria's pre-colonial political institutions. They include

i. Political and Administrative Indigenous Institutions,

ii. Socio-Cultural Organisations and

iii. Development and Economic Institutions

In the study, it was found that the indigenous political and administrative institutions which existed in various communities prior to colonialism consisted of the traditional leadership structures which played very important roles in the governance of their communities (Olowu and Erero, 1997). In North East Borno State of Nigeria for example, the traditional structure of governance was hierarchical with the Shehu of Borno and his council heading the entire emirate. The next level was the district which was headed by the district head and his council. Next were the villages whose affairs were handled by the village head (known as Lawan). At the base of the administrative structure were the wards which were governed by the hamlet or ward head (Bulama) and the council of elders (Dlakwa and Okafor, 1995).

Maduabum (2008) claims that what is known as Nigeria today emerged from a conglomeration of pockets of nationalities. He explains that Nigeria between the 14th and 18th centuries was a conglomeration of various empires such as the Oyo Empire, the Benin Empire, the Kanem-Bornu Empire, the Songhai Empire etc, which were autonomous entities and successfully administered. He observes that there existed an outstanding centralised political structure of government in the Sokoto Caliphate under the headship of Othman dan Fodio with an effective method of selecting and appointing rulers such as the emirs. These emirs ruled the various emirates and owed allegiance to dan Fodio and his two representatives at Gwandu and Sokoto. There is a general belief that the emirs had divine right to rule.

From the foregoing analysis of the pre-colonial political institutions of the selected territories, it is believed that many African countries had very stable indigenous political institutions which were undoubtedly in tandem with the cultural milieu of the people. Also, it is important to note that these indigenous political and administrative apparatus existed to promote harmony and peaceful coexistence among the indigenous people in the various kingdoms and empires that existed before the colonisation of Africa.

Colonial Administration in Africa and The Advent of Western Democracy

The potency of pre-colonial indigenous political institutions in Africa began to relapse with the conscious invasion of Africa by various European countries. Colonialism was invented in various forms by the colonialist. In some cases, colonialism was imposed by outright war between the colonialist and African leaders while in other cases colonialism was instituted with the consent and cooperation of some traditional African leaders. However, it has been

argued that the African traditional leaders did not consent to the type of colonial state which eventually evolved (Agbebaku and Aidelokhai, 1995).

The colonisation of Africa by European imperialist was motivated by three main factors- economic, political, and social. However, there was an overarching of the economic factor which began to develop in the nineteenth century when the slave trade became obviously obnoxious especially in terms of its profitability and debasement of humanity. This is in addition to the expansion of the European capitalist Industrial Revolution. The economic factor which is in form of capitalist industrialization includes the search for assured sources of raw materials, for guaranteed market outlets and profitable investment outlets; the same reason which spurred the European scramble and the partition and eventual conquest of Africa. Thus, the primary motivation for European intrusion was economic (Iweriebor @ exhibitions.nypl.org). While the political factor had to do with the inter European power tussle and competition for preeminence among Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain the social factor witnessed the battle of major European powers to contend with the gargantuan and multifarious social problem of unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and social displacement from rural areas (Iweriebor @ exhibitions.nypl.org). By 1900 a larger proportion of Africa has been colonised by the major European super power comprised of Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. This colonisation process set the stage for the administrative domination and economic exploitation of the colonized societies. Perhaps due to the military orientation and the racist ideology of the colonialists, the colonial states became authoritarian and excessively bureaucratic (Iweriebor @ exhibitions.nypl.org).

The Colonisation Process and Renaissance of African Democracy

No doubt, colonialism brought along with it the Western democratic structures and way of life which are considered alien to the African political milieu. Consequently, the African orientations, virtually in all ramifications were altered to reflect the European way of life. Typical of what Bulhan (2015) describes as the 'colonization of group behaviour'. According to Bulhan, colonization of Africa graduated and progressed from the occupation of land to the occupation of beings. In other words, colonialism visibly impacted on the social, political and economic lives of the colonized. To what extent did European colonisation impact on the democracy and politics of post colonial Africa states, particularly Nigeria?

The colonisation of Nigeria by the British invariably witnessed the introduction of several constitutional reforms and frameworks. There was the 1922 Clifford Constitution which introduced the elective principle in Nigeria and the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution which ostensibly entrenched the principle of federalism in Nigerian (Adigwe, 1989). Also through the colonisation process, the British introduced the Westminster parliamentary system of government in Nigeria which according to Maduabum (2008), was not only modeled along the British system of government but also greatly influenced by the British Government which granted independence to Nigeria at the time.

One noticeable impact of British colonialism on her former colonies was the excessive centralization of the political structures of her territories. The centralization of political structures in Nigeria under British colonial rule involved consolidating various regions and ethnic groups under a single colonial administration, though with some regional variations. This was achieved through direct and indirect rule, creating a centralized, albeit hierarchical system of governance. While aiming for efficiency and control, this process also laid the foundation for post-colonial political challenges related to unity and regional disparities. The British thus established a centralized colonial government, replacing pre-existing indigenous systems and establishing a clear hierarchy from the Governor-General to local administrators. The centralized colonial structure and the "divide and rule" policy have had lasting consequences on Nigeria's political landscape, influencing the relationship between the federal government and regional entities, and contributing to persistent ethnic and regional tensions (Lange in Ziltener and Kunzler, 2013). Colonial administration in Africa and particularly in Nigeria depicts exploitation, oppression, discrimination, cruelty, underdevelopment and poverty. Incidentally, the exploration and exploitation of the riches of Africa and her raw materials prospered the economies of imperialist countries. This is

antithetical to democracy; it is an anathema of egalitarianism which western democracy seeks to profess. The conflict inherent in the European orchestrated democracy has therefore provoked and intensified advocacy for a reversion to and renovation of the pre-colonial democratic practice and political structures.

A Case for African Democracy

Although, advocacy for an indigenous African model of democracy has not attracted the expected discourse in African philosophy over the years, a number of scholars have in recent times begun to see the imperatives of resonating and harnessing an indigenous African democratic culture and values, rooted in the traditional heritage of the African society capable of\ resolving her peculiar problems. A number of reasons have been adduced to buttress this renewed advocacy for an African model of democracy.

The colonial democratic structure inherited by the post-colonial African nations is believed to be dysfunctional in nature since the colonial democratic culture and political institutions bequeathed to African countries at independence merely created the mental picture of a 'dependent independent Africa'. The colonial political structure was imposed on Africa and Africans through the use of force. Many African countries were conquered and subdued to accept colonial rule. This culture of brute force became an enduring colonial legacy which later produced dictatorship and militarism across the African continent. It is for this reason Jost (1995) opines that after winning independence from European colonial powers, most African nations fell victim to dictatorial and military regimes.

Also, it has been argued that colonial politics and democratic structure and values grossly underdeveloped Africa. The point has already been made that the idea of European colonialism came with the tendency to primarily establish economic colonies. Therefore, through British colonial political system, many British former colonies including Nigeria were incorporated into the capitalist system; an economic system which engendered international economic inequality with African countries as victims of the unequal international relations. This whole idea revolves round the 'Universalist' thinking which prescribed western liberal democracy as a universal template and ultimate form of human government for African states together with its economic correlate, capitalism. This argument is premised on the assumption that the western liberal democracy is believed to be the most viable, desirable and imperative for addressing the challenges of development in third-world nations (Ademola, 2009).

On the other hand, the intensification of the advocacy for an African democracy and African democratic theory is based on the belief that such theory would be capable of addressing the peculiar socio-economic and political needs of the contemporary African state. This implies a reversion to the pre-colonial indigenous administrative system; the renaissance of the pre-colonial indigenous administrative structure. Interestingly, Traditionalism as a school of thought in the discourse on the state of democracy in Africa has expressed resentment at the way democracy is practiced today in the continent. For this school of thought, democracy as currently practiced in Africa can hardly be sustainable and incapable of resolving the crises besetting the continent. Those who have sympathy for an indigenous democratic system believe that such system could be more natural to the African culture. Therefore, they are of the opinion that the Western idea of democracy, which is fast gaining currency in contemporary Africa, should be jettisoned in lieu of our indigenous democratic culture (Ademola, 2009).

Pre-colonial indigenous political structures in Nigeria have been found to possess more formidable democratic values than the orchestrated western version. In the various pre-colonial kingdoms and empires, a kind of familial progressive democracy was practiced. In the old Oyo Kingdom for example, towns were delineated into quarters under their various rulers. Each town comprised of different family groups and what was known as villages of compounds from where the Obas were chosen. Frequent meetings were held by the various family groups where important issues concerning family members were deliberated upon, and one of the most important duties of the Family Head and the elders was to ensure that not only that every member's opinion was heard, but also that every member was encouraged to express his or her opinion. Thus, participation was regarded as every member's duty and the choice and/or election of those who govern at various levels was done in accordance with democratic principles. Thus, the appointment of a king under the kingdom was decidedly democratic (Akintoye, 2009).

Reversion to the pre-colonial indigenous African political values has been prescribed in place of the western liberal democracy because there is a general belief that the latter could be inadequate in addressing the problem of immorality and social injustice in post-colonial Africa state. In view of the problems bedeviling the social justice system in contemporary Africa vis a vis that of corruption, poverty and bad leadership, it has become imperative to appropriate relevant traditional institutions and values that define an indigenous justice system. The institution of social justice in pre-colonial Africa has a complementary relationship with traditional religion and morality. Where human knowledge and power is incapacitated, morality and religion become the ultra means of social justice. Thus, it has been recommended that one way of overcoming social injustice with all its threats to sustainable democracy is to embrace the complimentary contribution of spirituality and morality, which African traditional democratic practice affords. C.S. Momoh in Ademola (2009) captures this in his work, *Philosophy of a New Past and an Old Future*:

> *The present oath by our public officers during swearing-in ceremonies is a passive one. What we need is an active oath. An active oath is one …. Invoked in the name of indigenous gods, or spirits or juju… spelling out what should befall the oath taker if he willfully and deliberately enriches himself, friends or relations by exploiting or abusing his office (Ademola, 2009).*

In their argument for a renaissance of African indigenous democracy, Moshi and Osman in Ademola (2009), explained that western liberal 'democracy failed in many parts of Africa mainly because the Western political parties promoted class interests, whereas in Africa an established class system is mainly absent. They further contended that multiparty politics under the western liberal democracy does not consider indigenous cultural values, which makes multi-party electoral politics to degenerate into ethnic or communal rivalry and conflicts. Offor (2006) has argued that the practice of democracy in Africa and elsewhere should be done in recognition of the cultural differences. Offor (2006) and Wiredu (2009) are averse to the western model of majoritarian democracy which promotes multi-party system of politics in which the party that wins the most seats at the election forms the government. In such a political system, the losing party or parties become the opposition, singly or jointly and the minority representatives' votes are overridden by the votes of the majority. The implication of this is that the right of the minority representatives and their constituencies to meaningfully participate in the actual making of decisions is rendered nugatory. This has been a common cynosure in many contemporary African states where certain ethnic groups and political parties have found themselves perpetually in the minority and consistently staged outside the corridor of power; their fundamental human rights of decisional representation are permanently denied with impunity; all of this culminating in violation of the right of the minority and the many instances of political instability in Africa. This violation of rights of the minorities and the attendant political instability has no doubt intensified the advocacy for a return to the pre-colonial Africa indigenous political structures which depicts mutual tolerance and political inclusivity.

Conclusion

So far, we have been able to discuss the nature and identify the outstanding features and structure of the pre-colonial and colonial administrations in Africa. this was done with copious reference to Nigeria. We have also outlined the effects of colonialism on the democratic structures of post-colonial African states, particularly Nigeria.

By the very nature of European colonialism, it is believed to be a hostile system, unfriendly, acrimonious and has proved not to possess the mechanism to accommodate, harness and integrate a typical multi-ethnic and religiously diverse African society like Nigeria. Western democracy is believed to be alien and obtrusive to the African society; thus, it was misconceptualized, misunderstood and misappropriated. Periodic elections and politics which are common features of colonial politics degenerated to warfare in Nigeria and in many African countries. Paradoxically elections are never won and are never lost. Consequently, politics in many African countries and in Nigeria for instance has become very accusatorial and Hobbesian. An adversarial judicial system has become a permanent feature of Nigeria's election process. Laws are enacted, easily violated but are hardly enforced. The colonial democratic institution which was meant to establish order became an instrument for disorder and chaos. At this point it became

obvious that the average African and by extension the average Nigerian is by nature not a liberal democrat.

The character of the democratic structure bequeathed to post-colonial Africa by European colonialism created crisis for the post-colonial African states like Nigeria; crisis for the social classes. Unfortunately, post-colonial states of Africa like Nigeria lacks the capacity to mediate the struggle between classes and even within classes particularly the hegemonic class. Consequently, there is hardly any restraint on the means of acquiring power, holding it or using it. In Nigeria, might is coexistence with right. The subordinate classes have little power; although they really constitute a social force in the state but have no rights and their interests are hardly considered when it comes to matters of public policy formation. Even within the dominant class, the range of interest relevant to public policy is very narrow. In these circumstances, the government in power cannot claim legitimacy, only power (Ihonvbere, 1989).

The net effect of all of these is that contemporary African states like Nigeria are barely able to function as sovereign states; political instability has become endemic; disorder and chaos has continued to feature in Nigeria's politics. Ironically, those who propagate the ideals of liberal democracy are hounded down. For instance, under America's Bill Clinton's government, Chief Moshood Abiola, (a protagonist in the war for the economic liberation of Africa) who was allegedly democratically elected in the 1993 Nigeria's Presidential election had his election annulled by the military and was prevented from taking power. Abiola was to convene the First Pan African Conference on Reparations in 1993 (Pheko, 2012). The US government refused to intervene or show serious concern in the annulment of the election that would have brought Abiola to power, a contradiction of the same way it intervened in the Nicaragua and Persian Gulf crises.

In view of the identified negative effects of colonial politics on Africa nations like Nigeria, there has been a renewed interest to renovate and revive the pre-colonial indigenous political institutions; a call for an *African Model* of democracy. However, the clamour for an African indigenous model of democracy within the context of this work is not synonymous to a total abolition or abrogation of the formal democratic institution inherited from colonialism. Rather it is an advocacy to rijig and renovate the pre-colonial indigenous traditional political structures that existed in Nigeria. Therefore, to achieve a viable and dependable indigenous democratic institution, is not in formalising (or getting rid of) the informal institutions, nor in informalising the formal institutions; but in reconciling and working towards a convergence between adapted formal institutions and renovated informal, indigenous ones (Olowu and Erero, 1997).

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