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In Search of African Theory of Democracy: Utilising the Tiv Cultural Philosophy of *Ya-Na-Angbian*

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Abstract
The paper laments an absence of democratic theory in African political scholarship in providing the underlying principles, meaning, canons and nature of democracy as practiced in Africa for its sustainability and development. Consequently, it contends that an appraisal of our indigenous democratic values and practices as well as democratic ideas chiefly from Tiv cultural philosophy of *Ya-Na-Angbian (eat and give your brother)* with its egalitarian principles and confraternity can provide a vibrant African theory of democracy that can bring sustainable development to African continent. Secondary method of data collection, descriptive and expository analysis was used to explain and expound the Tiv Social and Political philosophy of *ya-na-angbian* and how it can be useful in this regard. The paper concluded that this can help in solving many of the obsessive contemporary socio-political problems facing democratic experiences in Africa for development to occur, if the Tiv philosophy of *Ya-na-Angbian* is utilized and integrated into the African theory of democracy.
Key words: Search, African theory, democracy, utilize, cultural philosophy

Introduction

The viability and possibility of an African theory of democracy has been greeted with doubt in African philosophical discourse. For many African political scientists, it is illogical to think of such a possibility, because their thoughts have been patterned towards copycatting alien theoretical models and practices of democracy (Wegh,1998). However, a number of scholars, (Ebo,1990,Rodopi,1993, Credu,2006,Warisu,1996; Wamba Dia,1990; Tangwa G, 1998, Ademola K F, 2009), have in recent times seen the need for the utilization of Africa's democratic heritage and values, rooted in her traditional past, in resolving her peculiar problems (Kazeem;2009). Since the early 1990s, the wave of democratization has been increasingly spreading across Africa. The long struggle for democracy in Africa is beginning to show results, as the continent is overcoming a legacy of authoritarianism to liberal democratic culture. These results, according to Claude Ake (in Ademola, 2009) are too impressive and too widespread to be ignored.

The demand for improved governance led to the rise of prodemocracy movements in African states, which resulted in sustained popular agitation for change (Lipset, 2002). On the external front, there were serious concerns from international agencies and donor nations on the autocratic regimes in African states to adopt democracy. The pressure from the international scene for universal human freedom and life with dignity, coupled with promises of improved bilateral relations for non-dictatorial states, stimulated the internal push for the enthronement of democracy in Africa (Ake in Ademola, 2009) .

However, this democratization trend taking shape in many states of Africa has paradoxically not yet produced the expected result of societal transformation, as cases of poverty, corruption, and insecurity among others still plague many African states. A consideration of the reason why there has not been any remarkable transformation in African states despite the enthronement of democracy need to be examined with a view to arrive at an African theory of democracy as it can be observed that the foreign theories of democracy as practiced by African States have failed to take root for sustainable development of the Continent.

The Meaning of Democracy

As a concept and form of government, democracy is quite old. It "entails a system of government that allows the citizens freedom to decide their desires Robert Dahl, for instance, advances three essential conditions for the well-functioning of a multiparty democracy. These are: a) extensive competition by political candidates and their groups or parties; b) political participation that provides the choice for the electorate to select candidates in free and fair elections; and, c) civil and political liberties that enable citizens to express themselves without fear of punishment (Dahl 1971, 221). Larry Diamond, sees democracy as encompassing "not only a civilian, constitutional, multiparty regime, with regular, free and fair elections and universal suffrage, but organizational and informational pluralism; extensive civil liberties; effective power for elected officials; and functional autonomy for legislative, executive and judicial organs of government" (Diamond in Kazeem 2009). Despite the many differences in how democracy is defined; Democracy emphasizes that values should not be forced upon any people, and stipulates liberty, the separation of power, majority rule, and the sovereignty of the people. Democracy gives primacy to political and moral values of equality, justice, reciprocity, and respect for the views of others for its sustainability and development.

Democracy and Development

One of the most difficult aspects of the concept of democracy is how it is practically translated into a functioning statehood in different societies (Ebo, 1990, Nyonyo,1992). This difficulty has led to different forms and stages of democracy, as well as to the serious contention on the link between democracy and development. Claude Ake cited in Ademola (2009), sees democracy as a sin qua non for development in Africa, because he believes that there is a causal relationship between democracy and development. But there is a definite correlation between the lack of democratic practices in African politics and the deteriorating economic condition (Radopi, 1993,Holden, 1974). If governments are not accountable to the people they govern, then they are very likely to engage in socio-economic practices which are not responsive to people's needs.

A critical analysis of the evolution of the democratic idea and practices, and of the global advance of democracy in governance, suggests that democratic governance appeals to and grows out of the universal human values of dignity and freedom. Where democratic governance has failed as in Africa, it has done so more due to imperfect institutions rather than to the "unripenness" of a given country (Lipset, 2002:10).

Traditionalism and Democracy in Africa

In a bid to justify the imposition of "civilized" government" on their colonial territories, European imperialists characterized African pre-colonial political structures as barbaric, autocratic and oppressive (Stumpf,1994; Wamba etal,199). Nevertheless, that conception was grossly inaccurate for many traditional African societies like the TIV people of Central Nigeria with their Democratic philosophy of *YA-NA-ANGBIAN*(Abraham,1933*)*. The Tiv people in trying to enhance the ontological order for a more cohesive, stable, democratic and developmental society (Ayaka,2009), imbibed the philosophy of ya-na-angbian. Literally, it means 'eat and give your brother'. This principle "demands fair and equitable distribution of social and political resources among the various segments of Tiv society."(Anshi,2004:6) At the same time, it is a "philosophy of fairness and altruism, equity,justice and responsibility."(Anshi,2004:12)

The purpose of highlighting the Tiv philosophy of ya-na-angbian is to expose, evaluate and project this element of African democratic and political philosophy which is fundamental in addressing the problem of corruption, greed, domination, discrimination, nepotism and marginalization which are the hallmark of imported liberal democracy, not just in Tiv society but other similar societies in Africa as well; to explain the indispensable nature of this theory to contemporary Tiv politics and stability; to establish the fact that ya-na-angbian does not only entail sharing but unreserved fraternal and transparent service to humanity that was in existence in Tiv society before the advent of colonialism (Fortes etal, 1940).

The philosophy of ya-na-angbian is important giving that it will bring out the inadequacies in the modern imposed democratic conception and explain its true meaning and how it ought to be incorporated and practiced in Africa. It postulates a socio-political theory that has relevance all over the world as regards the distribution of leadership positions and wealth and true service to humanity for the general wellbeing of all. The theory of Ya-na-angbian which emphasizes equitable and just sharing of power and wealth has the potential of saving humanity from prejudice and bias that has bedeviled the corrupt African society, particularly in terms of ethno-religious crisis, corruption, greed, self-centredness and marginalization which are the hallmark of modern democracy in Africa (Gyekye, 1997). It will also avert the problem of gross individualism, nepotism and domination by unscrupulous African leaders who see themselves as the only competent people that are qualified to rule in their respective nation states (Ruch etal, 1981).

First and foremost, it could be understood that *Ya-na-angbian* being a traditional political and democratic philosophy does not only imply justice and fairness as could be seen in zoning and power rotation. Secondly, that *Ya-na-angbian* implies zoning, power rotation, selfless service to humanity, democratic consolidation and holistic development of the society. Thirdly, this philosophy through 'lending-*injo'* permits that a position should be zoned out of a particular segment that fails to present a competent person for election(Akase etal2013, Agber, 1989). Fourth, that this democratic philosophy has the potential to avert the leadership problems of looting, greed, fainthearted corruption, alienation and ethno-religious crisis that has stampeded the progress and development of Tiv society. Lastly, there is need for the entrenchment of this socio-political philosophy in the Constitutions of the African nation States (Wegh,1998).

General Principles of the Philosophy

The philosophy of Ya-na-Angbian is a socio-political and cultural philosophy of the Tiv people of Central Nigeria, however, other tribes in Africa particularly, in Nigeria may built their uniqueness on the principles of this philosophy (Fortes, 1940). It is an old aged philosophy whose origin is as old as Tiv people. According to Anshi Martin Wang (2004) "Eat and give your brother" is the transliteration of the term- Ya-na-Angbian. In other words, it connotes what Julius Nyerere confronts in his political system of Ujamaa, which basically revolved around the indigenous practice of African brotherhood, family assembly and being your brothers' keeper (Iorshenge,2001, Nomshan 2002).

This philosophy is simply summed up in the principle of fraternity. Ya-na-Angbian as a Tiv socio-political philosophy is built on the idea of kinship ties and has long been in the body politics of the people. It is a philosophy of fairness and altruism, equity, justice and responsibility (Wang,2004;Kerker,2002)..

The reason is that Tiv nation was caught up in the cobweb of majority/minority issues with some northern tribes who initially considered Benue State (where the Tiv people dominate) an annexation of the North. Secondly, the majority/minority dispute that characterized the power sharing formula in the days of Benue-Plateau informed Tiv people to rejuvenate and popularize their ideology that will bind them together to fight for what belongs to them to avoid being schemed out of the share of state resources, hence; the philosophy of *Ya-na-Angbian* (Makar1994).

Specific Principles of Ya-na-Angbian

The philosophy of Ya-na-Anbian is built on the following principles; fairness, justice, equity, altruism and hospitality. Others include; responsibility, communalism and transparency.

Fairness/Justice/Equity

Ya-na-Angbian is a philosophy that is grounded heavily on the idea of fairness. It also dwells on justice principle and believes that leadership at all levels should not be confirmed on one particular tribe, region, or person or group of persons. But rather, it should be a shared responsibility to all qualified individuals, tribes or groups. Politically, Ya-na-Angbian defamed the Nigeria popular adage of "winner takes all" and ethnic based politic, greed and selfishness (Jibo,1993). It is a philosophical principle which advocate fairness in everything be it political or economic resources. For Akiga, therefore, the entire philosophy of Ya-na-Angbian is built on equity (cited in Kerker 30). Altruism/Brotherly This principle is opposed to egoism or selfishness. Altruism connotes regards for others, both natural and moral or it means devotion to the interest of others. A Tiv person is unselfish and eschews all attempts to greed. He gives his brother the last lump of the food in his palm and confirms that, ka ingin iwaren or ye; "it is this one that saves somebody". He practically invites you to eat with him no matter how small the food is. The brotherhood of the Tiv man consecrates the family piety that was (is) crusaded by Confucius in his principle of the "jen". No matter what comes to play, the Tiv man is hospitable and open to others (Wegh,1998).

Hospitality

Hospitality means the act or service of welcoming, receiving, hosting, or entertaining guests. The philosophy of YanaAnmgbian is also built on hospitality. This sense of hospitality is inherently essential in the currently surviving African values. There is always spontaneous welcome and accommodation to strangers and visitors. The Tiv man easily incorporate stranger and give him lands to settle hoping that he would go one day, and the land would be reverted to the owner. This is usually done with the belief that one will never opt out of his own community. Unlike his Western counterpart, no appointment and special invitation are needed for one to visit a distant relation or neighbor (Iorshenge,2001). On arrival, once there is food the visitor is invited to eat. He is treated kindly, just as one would wish to be treated when visiting another home. Like other Africans the Tiv man has symbolic ways of expressing welcome. These include the presentation of drinking water from calabash along with native fruits called Nyakough (black nightshade-solanumnigrum), Mngishim (garden egg), slaughtering of fowl to prepare the meal in honour of the guest. The basis of this hospitality is that "a guest must not harm his

host for whatsoever intention he has before he visit him, and that when he goes home; he should not develop a hunch back"(Iorundu etal 2019;23) . It is very unfortunate that this level of hospitality is interpreted maliciously by many un-informed scholars. Some persons even alleged that the Tiv man normally give out his wife to his guest for sexual satisfaction. What the Tiv man does was to leave his matrimonial bed for the guest while he resorts to manage a locally made bed (usually, one made of palm fronts) with his wife and probably, the children. Another aspect of hospitality which is highly cherished is sharing with a needy neigbour who comes for assistance. Anybody who has and does not assist is taken to be a bad fellow. Hence, Akiga introduces the selfless Tiv communal system and fraternity of the universal brotherhood with the cricket story: where the cricket is shared among those who are at the meal table and other parts reserved for those absent. The head of the cricket is given to the owner whereas; the hind legs to the other and so on till the parts are conveniently shared amongst the people (Cited in Kerker 30). This second distributive attitude at meal extends to all aspects of the political and community life. This is why J.S Tarkaa could call on a Hausa man from Borno state, outside the Tiv division to contest and win an election to the Northern House of Assembly under the cognomen of Iwarwar Gatie (Jibo, 1993).

Responsibility

Responsibility connotes one's duty to deal with or take care of somebody or something to avoid blame. Ya-na-Angbian is a philosophy that entrust a lot of responsibility on the leader to the people whom he rules. Hence, the principles of Ya-na-Angbian are opposed to any attempt by an individual to accumulate material wealth and use it to grasp absolute power because power is given by the people (Wegh 15). It is a democratic principle which bestows absolute power to the people. The principle further enjoins our leaders to dissuade themselves from the irresponsive act of selfishness, corruption and all the public vices that provoke and endanger the masses' confidence in the leadership(Iorshenge,2001).

Communalism

The concept "communalism" is not applicable only to Africa; it also applies to other continents of the world. Communalism is synonymous to Africa because, it finds its usefulness within the African way of life, or what we can conveniently call African world view (Gyekye,1997). Communalism normally takes the form of communal living or communal property, among others. It is sometimes said to put the interests of the community above the interests of the individual, but this is usually only done on the principle that the community exists for the benefit of the individuals who participate in it. A comprehensive grasp of communalism presupposes knowledge of what a community is, and upon this knowledge lays the bedrock for our explication (Obi, 1999). The diction "no man is an island" according to Mvendaga finds a patent expression in the communal character of African life. Communal living which breeds solidarity is a value that makes an African realizes his needs within the community stating the importance and indispensability of communal living. Hence; Aristotle once declared, "he who is unable to live in a society or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must either be a beast or a god" (cited in Stumpf 1994). Mvendaga affirmed Aristotle‟s position when he declared thus; in the communitarian culture of Africa, man finds fulfillment and the sense of belonging. He sees his contribution and those of others not as infinitesimal but as enormous and vital to the growth of all. For him, "we are the community and the community is us", nobody may be treated as stronger either in right or in responsibilities (32). In fact, Mbiti, J.S. expresses the communal attitude of the African thus, "I am because we are; and since we are, I am" (Mbiti, 1973: 11). This value is of great importance. It makes the African his brother‟s keeper as it ensures mutual protection among people. He asserts further that a brother‟s misfortune was a common misfortune. For instance; if there was fire outbreak in one's house immediately and spontaneously, the whole community will gather, work hard to extinguish the flames; and in the instance where they failed, rebuilding the damaged house would be resorted to. People would assist with labour and building materials without been begged to do so. This was not only spontaneous; it was also „gratis‟. Also, a brother‟s success was equally a common success, celebrated as such "we have made it in you", it is echoed (Kerker etal,2002:5).

The philosophy behind the African Communalism, therefore guarantees individual responsibility within the communal ownership and relationship.

Transparency/Public Purity

Apart from the above mentioned principles therefore, Ya-na-Angbian had the principle of transparency and public purity as the basic regulatory principle which seeks to regulate the life of the leader and his followers. Mvendaga Jibo shows this feature in his analysis of Tiv political behaviour from 1959-1993 during which Tiv sons swore affidavits to expose the uncompromising and unbecoming attitudes of their fellow Tiv brothers in public positions of leadership. Similarly this socio-political philosophy is egalitarian and avoids individualism (Lipset,2000). This expresses the collective, communal and brotherly piety for one another. Therefore, the love

of your brother goes a long way to explaining your benevolence towards him. His needs are your needs and you strive to apportion to him what is his due. Provided you are there, he feels represented and accumulates a lot of confidence and trust in you, that all is well with him too. This confidence is founded on the premise that, you cannot fail him and he finds it naturally ungrateful if he attempts to agitate for your position. This confidence and trust on the leaders culminates into a sense of responsibility and altruism and also the challenge to live up to expectation. One essential fact to note is that the promotion of these principles will curb the menace of deprivation and the far cry of public marginalization, oppression, and abandonment of the course of development by African leaders through the instrumentality of Swem oath taking to administer the people justiciable.

In order to strictly adhere and obey these principles for the general good and development of Tiv society by the leaders, there is an instrument to observe and administer instant justice to those who are accused of perpetrating injustice in Tiv society known as *SWEM* oath taking which regulates social relationships for the general good of Tiv society as explained below.

Swem as an Instrument of Instant Justice

The bad *mbatsav* (as any wrong-doer is termed *or-mbatsav*. Plural *mbatsav)* are willful, "malevolent, selfish and destructive criminal" set of people, who "disrupt the social fabric of the community" (Wegh, 1998, p. 605). Bad mbatsav are usually people thought to always harbour evil intentions and work to harm others and bring about stagnation of the society. They do this through the manipulation and application of supernatural powers. Thus, it is the evil intention and wickedness of this group of mbatsav, and other people with love for crime in Tivland that brought about the Swem oath for the purpose of justice and peace-making. Therefore, the Swem became an oath of justice among all the Tiv people. The oath ensured that every Tiv person got the justice they deserved good or bad. This is because some crimes are considered evil (Kwagh-bo) and included such crimes as murder, adultery, incest or suicide, and also wilfully invited calamities in the land (Abraham, 1933), if appeasements were not made urgently. Other crimes were considered social disturbances (kwagh-dzaniyol) and included acts such as rape, theft and arson. In these various cases, depending upon the degree of the crime committed, varying approaches were employed in adjudicating cases, for the purpose of granting appropriate justice. Elders were therefore, allowed to deliberate on the cases to determine guilt. Therefore, depending upon the result of the deliberation, they then decided on the adequate type of chastisement applicable. These may include ordeals, fines or banishment" (Kerker, 2002). The role of the elders in adjudication was necessary to avoid the swearing of Swem oath which brought justice through stiffer penalty.). To this end, the Swem Oath became very essential means of deciding matters in Tiv society (Nomshan,2022). The parties involved in the conflicts took oaths together with their witnesses. The oath which was sworn on the Swem decided matters within short periods. Oral traditions of the Tiv claim that the Tiv people hates lies and so, the Swem was quick at bringing liars to instant justice (Nomshan, 2022). Whenever the accused person or persons refused to confess to the crimes they committed, they were made to take the Swem oath. For example, in Tiv method of administration of justice, according toNomshan is that, " all the accused persons will be called out to swear on the Swem pot using the following statement:

"*This swem listen! If I know anything about witches, or I have donated my child to be killed by witches, or I have done anything that would retard the development or wellbeing of a brother or community, let this swem cause my stomach to swell up so that I shall die! But if I do not know anything about his death or this accusation I shall be safe, while all who are involved in the plot shall die"* (Nomshan, 2022:16). And if such persons were guilty of the accusation, the Swem divination pot caused their legs and abdomen to swell up, leading to their instant death. This checkmates the excesses of any person that might find himself in a position of leadership in Tiv society (Nomshan,2022).

Summary and Conclusion

The Tiv philosophy of Ya-na-Angbian with its principles as discussed above, if adopted as an African theory of democracy, can help African States to eschew self-centeredness, injustice, corrupt practices, and ethnic bias in dealing with national issues. For instance, the principle of fairness will help African States to learn to be diligent and just in the treatment of fellow human beings. Politically, the principle will help to shape the power rotation policy as well as the allocation of resources equitably for the welfare of everybody. This will go a long way to cubing inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic rivalries across African States. On the other hand, the principle of hospitality will help to build the spirit of tolerance among different ethnic groups. It will also help to cushion the negative effect of religious intolerance, and tribal sentiment which has disengaged people from their original settlements Akase etal, (2013). Most importantly, the spirit of hospitality will help to unite African nations whose bilateral and unilateral agreement has been terminated as a result of one disagreement to another. Hospitality if inculcated will help to build a peaceful nation where citizens will be free to move and free to settle anywhere. Finally, the

principle of responsibility will help to direct leaders on their respective duties and service to humanity. Most of the African leaders today lack the zeal and vision to govern (Fortes, 1940). Consequently, these leaders turn tyrant to scare their subjects away from demanding for what is due for them. Therefore, if the principles of Philosophy of Ya na Angbian are adopted and put into practice by well-meaning African leaders, there will not only be justice, tolerance and commitment in governance, but there will be development in African States.

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