

# DEMOCRACY, MULTI-ETHNIC IDENTITIES, AND POVERTY IN AFRICA

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*Abstract: Given the fact that democracy has come to be accepted as a framework for good governance in most parts of the world and given the fact that most states in Africa are multi-ethnic in nature, which presupposes some contestations in the sharing of the benefits and burden of democracy, to what extent has poverty in its material and mental dimensions remained a major obstacle to the realization of the goals and promises of democracy in Africa? In this paper, I examine the incongruous interface of democracy, multi-ethnic identities and poverty in Africa. I argue that much as democracy is desired as providing the basis for the realization of the goals of freedom, common good and development, the goals have become unrealizable in many multi-ethnic states in Africa. This is mainly due to certain contestations in their claim to rights, especially in sharing resources accruing from social cooperation. The inability to realize the promises of democracy in Africa's multiethnic states is grossly exacerbated by material poverty of vast majority of citizens on the one hand, and the mental poverty of the African elites on the other hand. The paper recommends that true and functional democracy, which is perhaps the most preferred form of government due to its guarantee of freedom and common good, will only be realized in Africa if material poverty is alleviated among the vast populace in Africa and this will stem the often chaotic claims to rights among the ethnic groups in enjoying the benefits of social cooperation. This will subsequently check the mental poverty of the elites, seen in terms of unbridled quest for material aggrandizement and political power as a sure way of protecting ethnic groups and preventing ethnic marginalization. This is possible because the welfare state will be a common rallying point for the citizens rather than the ethnic groups. This paper underscores the crucial place of poverty in African body polity and therefore stresses the need for its alleviation or drastic reduction as the basis for achieving the goals of democracy in African multi-ethnic states.*

## Introduction

In recent times, any paper about Africa starts with problems and challenges of development. Perhaps this is the main reason why many African philosophers, including this writer, cannot afford the luxury of analytic philosophy. The problems of Africa are much more fundamental than linguistic and semantic analysis. African philosophers mostly engage in linguistic analysis to situate the context of their discourse. Thereafter, concrete solution is sought for a scenario of want and absurdity that confronts Africa on daily basis. Whether the problem of Africa is structural, ideological, political, economic or cultural, the fact remains that all these perspectives

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have metamorphosed in abject poverty for Africans and the continent. The question then bothers on how abject poverty, construed especially in material and mental forms, has negatively affected democracy and multi-ethnic identities in Africa. The three major terms of this discourse—democracy, multi-ethnic identities and poverty—are common terms across the continents of the world as they feature in one way or the other in political lexicons of people. The only difference may be in terms of their occurrence and impact across continents. In this discourse, attention is focused on the interplay of these concepts within Africa, especially the sub-Saharan Africa where I am most familiar with. My central argument is that poverty, in its both material and mental dimensions, has compounded the practice of democracy and aggravated the problems of multi-ethnic identities in Africa. In fact, it has strengthened ethnic identities to the detriment of national identity thereby giving continuous credence to Peter Ekeh's inferences in the two *publics*—the civic and the primordial publics (Ekeh, 1975). Peter Ekeh's argument is simply that the civic public is simply there for the exploitation of the primordial public as there is little commitment to the former since it is seen as a colonial imposition.

The scenario described above has further led to poor governance as demonstrated in government's lack of will to meet its obligation to citizens as deciphered in poor standard of living, urban anarchy, corruption, bad leadership, insecurity, and general discontent. Social order in the normative sense and sustainable development have now become a mirage in many African countries whose citizens were very optimistic at the dawn of political independence in the 1950s and 1960s. Little wonder that xenophobic attacks are now the order of the day in some African countries, especially South Africa where we witness black inhumanity to fellow blacks

It must be stated that there is no society without its own perennial problems but the point of scholarship and research papers such as this is not to point out what we have done right as such but what needs to be done, especially in areas where we are still lagging behind in qualitative and quantitative developments. Given this fact, I propose the establishment of a welfare state, albeit with certain modifications in view of communal paternalism characteristic of many African states, that will cater for all within the confines of civil and individual rights, and which at the same time will not be hijacked or 'kidnapped' by self-serving political elites that exhibit signs of mental poverty at their ascendancy to political office. The underlying argument is that the eradication of material poverty is a veritable basis for the flourishing of democracy and the management of ethnic crisis and identities, either by centripetal or centrifugal forces, in Africa. Of course, ethnic groups could only reconcile themselves to one another in a situation where there is ample opportunity for survival, especially through just federalism as championed by federal and ethnicity scholars like Eghosa Osaghae (See Osaghae, 2019). The access to basic goods is very germane for survival in whatever nation-states the ethnic groups find themselves

In coming to terms with the aim of this paper, I interrogate the following issues, not from any disparate points of view but from interconnected perspectives: Democracy and its prospects, especially in Africa, the question of poverty and democratization in Africa, which is more or less an incongruous interface and lastly, I make a case for a new narrative of a welfare state, which although a part of traditional

African communal system, has not been given adequate emphasis in contemporary African states. The central argument of this paper is that poverty has constituted a major reason why democracy, seeing as a system of government with the greatest prospects, has not flourished or worked in Africa. Poverty has also exacerbated ethnic crisis in unprecedented dimension. Although, there are other reasons for the crisis of development in Africa, such as deficit leadership, economic dislocation, corruption and lack of national consciousness, it is my fervent belief that the combatting of the challenge of poverty will pave way for resolving other crises of development in Africa instead of strengthening these crises

Our argument basically is that material poverty which is concomitant with mental poverty, has undermined the flourishing of democratic principles and compounded the complex nature of ethnicity in Africa such that the concept of national interest, national consciousness and march towards genuine nationhood continue to decline while group loyalty continues to soar resulting in deficit governance invigorated by centripetal and centrifugal forces that want to appropriate the resources of the state. Our thesis is that irrespective of several theories that have been implicated in African crisis of development project, which is better predicated on democracy because of freedom and common good, such as leadership, resource control, ethnicity, corruption, post colonialism and other externalist and internalist factors, the tackling of poverty (qualitative and quantitative reduction) at the basic level will reduce tension in other areas of national life and engender a narrative of common welfare, which is basic to the survival of any human society.

### I. Democracy and its Promises

The functionality of democracy across the world cannot be contested. This is even to the extent that some military dictatorships, monarchical institutions and sub-governmental organizations and families claim to be democratic. What then is democracy that it has commanded so much attraction far and near. Without bothering us much about how democracy evolved in ancient Greece, and how it has come to be defined as 'government of the people by the people and for the people' through Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address, I want to state certain features of democracy which make it conducive to human freedom and development which I had earlier stated elsewhere (Cf. Oyeshile, 2009: 37-48). These include but not limited to sovereignty of the people, accountable leadership, periodic election encapsulated in universal adult suffrage, respect for the rule of law, protection of fundamental human rights, freedom of association, religion and opinion. Invariably, these features of democracy have become enshrined in many national constitutions such that one begins to have the impression that every modern state is democratic.

William M. Rensinger in his *Selected Definitions of Democracy* (2008) has given about twenty-five definitions of democracy from Aristotle to Albert Weale. These definitions fall under such categories as: democracy as a danger, as competition, as mass and equal participation, as liberty and rights and as deliberation. It is worthy of note that democracy has enjoyed a lot of attraction over the ages. Some construe democracy as a danger because they see it as a process where the incompetent many

through election appoint the corrupt few. This position is usually traced to George Bernard Shaw. In spite of this view, many people tend to embrace democracy because it promotes individual liberty and common good which are *sine qua non* to progressive society.

The principle of sovereignty of the people underscores the fact that government derives its legitimacy or power to control from the people and is therefore responsible to them. The social contract theories as can be gleaned in works like Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, Jean Jacques Rousseau's *General Will* and John Stuart Mill's *Essay on Liberty* (1859), among others, provide the theoretical basis for modern democracy as they stress the fundamental implicit agreement between the government and the governed, to such extent that individuals willingly transfer their right of self-governance to a constituted authority to exercise certain powers on their behalf.

Underlying the transfer of rights to a sovereign is a clear indication of the right, autonomy and freedom of individuals. The basis of this line of argument is that it is only free individuals that can voluntarily transfer their rights to others. The major implication of this transfer of rights, which excluded fundamental human rights, is that if rights are transferred to a group of people, the group of people who holds the power in trust must be accountable to the person or persons who transferred the power to it. Hence, there is a sacred trust that must not be betrayed by the government. In democracy, in any part of the world, trust is very sacrosanct and essential for the sustenance of democracy.

It is very interesting to note that all the features of democracy are intertwined. Talk of one, then you talk about the others. For instance, to be accountable means that those who hold the sovereignty in trust must be reliable, trustworthy and ready to pursue the goals of justice, equality and welfare for and on behalf of their subjects. Being accountable also means managing the human and natural resources of their representatives in just manner devoid of avarice, greed and self-centeredness. Given this case, those in government must also present themselves regularly to their subjects for renewal of mandate through periodic elections that conform with the laid-down principles of free, inclusive and fair election. These factors that have been mentioned form the foundation and hallmark of democracy and democratic governments all over the world (Oyeshile, 2009, 42). It is very fundamental that there is conformity to the principles for any government, institution and group to claim to be democratic. It is therefore not the tag-democracy-that makes a government democratic but adherence and conformity to democratic principles (See Ake, 1996; Irele, 1993; Oladipo, 1998). What then are the prospects of democracy and why has it not achieved the desired prospects in many parts of Africa? I shall involve myself here with about three prospects of democracy, which I believe, have far-reaching implications. These are participation of all stakeholders, accountable leadership and the rule of law

According to Owolabi (1999, 7), the concepts of participation and accountability are crucial in any system that purports to be democratic. It is actually both concepts that make the people sovereign. And once any government manifests these features, it can be said to be democratic. Hence, once "a regime or political entity can only be democratic, if and only if, it has institutions for the maintenance of the participation

of the people and the accountability of those chosen to direct the daily affairs of governance” (Owolabi, 1999:7)

How then do the two principles play out within a political system? Owolabi opines that participation as a major foundation of democracy is often associated with the electoral process of choosing the leaders. But this is not limited to voting alone but: Participation of the citizens in a democratic society involves all the citizens in the society, it includes all the activities they carry out in order to make government pursue their interests both as an individual and as a group. It is precisely the freedom that an individual has under a democratic order to agitate for his interests and engage in discussions and debates with others on the appropriate path to follow in order to realize the common good (1999: 7).

The import of the above is that participation entails getting the citizens involved at every level of governance. In this process, everyone deemed to be rational, whether poor or rich, an elite or a downtrodden is entitled to be part of decision making in any democratic society. And due to expansion in population the people after voting in election commits further participation into the hand of their representatives-at the local, state, regional and national levels. Ideally, this is what participation entails

The second attraction of democracy is accountability. Accountability in terms of being answerable to the citizens who have elected the leaders to political offices. Political accountability can be said to incorporate various dimensions of being accountable. This means that in managing the human and material resources put in their care the leaders must act in the best possible way that will further the interest of the people. This could be in many facets such as taking economic decisions, entering into treaties, going to peace treaty or war with another nation and taking vital decisions at the period of emergencies. The logical implication of this analysis is that since the people have willingly transferred their sovereignty to a body of men and women, it is incumbent on this body to justify the confidence reposed in it by promoting the overall interest of the people. There are also democratic procedures by which representatives can be made to give account for their stewardship through recall, impeachment and rejection at the polls.

The notion of accountability is very fundamental in any democracy. For Owolabi, it is essentially symbolized by the relation between the state and society. According to Chabal:

Ordinarily, the notion of accountability connotes the responsiveness of the government to the citizens, but in actual fact, the concept is more than that. It is more than the constitutional and institutional devices which formally hold rulers to account for their deeds. It is also part of the social fabric of society in relations between patrons and clients, ethnic leaders and their kin, party bosses and party members, bureaucrats and citizens, employers and employees, mullahs and believers, military and civilians (Owolabi, 1999:9; See Chabal, 1986)

Therefore, accountability is gauged with the extent of the responsiveness and responsibility of the government towards its people. Accountability is one of the

dividends the people get by entrusting a group of people with power. Owolabi puts the phenomenon of accountability thus:

It is the standard of testing the legitimacy of any government, particularly a democratic regime because the more accountable a regime is, the more legitimate and the more acceptable it becomes. A regime, in fact, can lay claim to being democratic, if and only if, the regime allows for maximum participation of the people and gives maximum accountability to them (Owolabi, 1999: 10).

The other attraction of democracy is the rule of law, which also stipulates total conformity to the constitution. In any true democracy, the people including the rulers are subjected to the constitution such that nobody no matter his or her status is above the law of the land. In cases of disputes, the constitution is the supreme documents that gives direction. The constitution must not only exist, it must be applied and followed to the letters. This is what is known as constitutionalism, which is the adherence to constitutional provisions. In this regard therefore, although the leaders are there to lead the people, they are not to do it through their whims and caprices but through a laid down procedure as enunciated in the constitution. Since the rule of law is to apply to all, everyone is equal before the law.

Given these attractive features of democracy, one begins to wonder why democracy has not succeeded in many African states. I will adduce some reasons for this. First, the elites that are supposed to be the main drivers of democracy in Africa have failed in their duty because of parochial interests that make them see governance as a kind of business investment engaged in to better their lot, that of their kinsmen, their cronies and their family members. This has resulted in the flagrant abuse of power to the extent that democratic principles are only followed at convenience. The failure of elite has also resulted in corruption and corruptible attitude where state power has become the instrument for amassing wealth and violating democratic principles. Second, the ethnic configuration in many states in Africa has resulted in major disloyalty to the state such that democracy is seen not as the government of the entire citizens but government of particular ethnic groups. This has been the scenario in many multi-ethnic states in Africa such that clan consciousness has replaced national consciousness. More attention will be given to this factor in the next section of the paper.

Apart from elite failure and ethnic loyalty, the problem of poverty has made nonsense of democratic principles in several ways. For instance, the inability of the citizens to have any sustainable means of sustenance due to bad planning, corruption and inability to engender a political economy pragmatic enough to meet modern economic challenges have made the people susceptible to ethnic and religious manipulation. In the face of abject poverty, accountability, participation and the rule of law only exist on the pages of the constitution and not in the mind of the people. So, poverty has become a major factor in the democratic development of many states in Africa. Little wonder then that many theories on democracy and development have

failed to work because the challenge of poverty has remained a daunting one. I shall devote more attention to the phenomenon of poverty in the latter part of this paper

In some cases, too, the military organized elections, installed their stooges, if they did not install themselves initially, and later overthrew them in *coup d'états*. So, the new wave of democratization did not reduce the level of political instability or improved the level of democratization in Africa. The consequence was then obvious as many states in Africa were turning to failed states. The states could hardly justify their existence as they could not maintain law and order, and also could not guarantee the conducive social environment needed for individual citizens and ethnic groups to actualize their potentials and live the good life or the live of happiness, according to Aristotle. A look at some states in Africa shows that those who hold sovereignty in trust for the people have failed to deploy it for the service, protection and sustenance of the people

Many theorists on African development have also implicated multi-party democracy as the bane of development in Africa as it leaves room for winner takes all while some parties mainly formed on ethnic basis remain perpetually in minority and opposition. This has prompted the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu to advocate for a non-party politics in Africa (Wiredu,1996). The non-party politics advocated by Wiredu is based on consensus and dialogue, but one doubts if this recommendation can work in complex societies with large populations. Also, the beauty of democracy consists in the freedom to choose among others. One doubts if the non-party politics will not at the end of the day negate vital democratic principles.

Furthermore, most citizens in emerging democracies in Africa talk more about rights than duties. In this situation democracy can hardly yield any dividends as rights and duties go together in any democratic arrangement. Little wonder then that people hardly perform their civic duties such as paying taxes and being committed to the state institutions to engender sustainable development. Also, many citizens, especially the leaders, hide under the rule of law to subvert the commonwealth of many African states by invoking constitutional provisions to delay and possibly subvert the course of justice.

One can continue to give plethora reasons why democracy has not worked in Africa. Even as of today some scholars are still implicating colonialism and post colonialism among other external factors for the failure to get democratic governance right in Africa. Other scholars have also consistently blamed internal factors as mainly responsible for the failure of governance in Africa. These internal factors include but are not limited to bad leadership, corruption, ethnicity and inability to develop viable and feasible internal structures to meet the African challenge (Falaiye, 2012]. My effort in this paper will be to show how ethnicity and poverty have remained many obstacles to the flourishing of democracy in many states in Africa and how poverty has fueled ethnicity in the negative sense, such that ethnicity, a natural human disposition is now a problem

## II. Multi-Ethnic Identities in Africa and Democracy

The discourse on ethnicity, culture, society and shifting identities becomes imperative when one considers the trajectory of Africa's development in the last 80 years, especially with developments after the political independence of most African states that were brought together by colonial incursion into Africa. For instance, many states that emerged after political independence were a motley of tribes and nationalities being forced together into one country. Immediately this occurred, there emerged a struggle for supremacy to control political power which forms the basis of other power configurations such as economic power. This scenario also formed the basis of multi-ethnic states. Let us note that in the period following World-war II, hasty decolonization created artificial multi-ethnic states when independence was granted to formal colonial territories without any attempt to tailor the new states in accordance with ethnic and cultural realities (Oyeshile, 2004: 292). The problem of shifting identities in the quest for who controls what and gets what directly led to changing relations even among ethnic nationalities that constitute a state. These states then were far from being a nation in the real sense of the term.

The struggle in most African states has been on how to overcome the artificiality of the states and evolve nation states that will cater for the pluralism occasioned by colonialism and work for sustainable development. Ethnic identity is a major issue in the construction of citizenship all over the world. Many believe that ethnic identity is more deep-seated than religious identity to the extent that one is born into an ethnic group, with or without religious affiliation. Furthermore, religious identity is more often than not optional. This is not to claim that religious identity is not imposed at times. In Africa, the ethnic issue is also invoked as the religious one in the political space of various African states.

Francis O. Egbokhare (2015) in his lecture "The Second Pledge: Differential and Variegated Citizenship and the Challenges of National Building" focusing on Nigeria devoted considerable attention to ethnicity and citizenship, claiming that we are all fundamentally settlers at one point or the other and should therefore be tolerant of one another in order to engender development. Egbokhare makes an interesting point in his analysis we consider deserves our attention in this essay. He observes, *inter alia*, that:

While acknowledging...the issue of citizenship, rights and obligations, we emphasize the traditional, socio-political and economic factors that are involved in variegation and differentiation of citizenship. We look at the role of literature, history, use of mother-tongue in the promotion of national identity. We draw on linguistic evidence to corroborate the reality of a Nigerian identity and affirm that elite groups competing for resources in a very narrow economic (sense) exploit ethnicity to gain advantage. Ethnicity is a symptom, not a disease (Egbokhare, 2015: 56-57).



From the above, it is obvious that both religious and ethnic identities are invoked to protect elite interest and not the interest of the mass of Nigerians, hence the need to go beyond religion and ethnic identities.

There is no controversy as to who an African is. But when we move from this general tag it becomes very unsettling to determine who a Nigerian or Sudanese or Ivorian or a Zambian is. Let us recall the case of Abduraham Shugaba in Nigeria's second republic who was deported from Nigeria allegedly for not being a citizen of Nigeria. The case of the onetime president of Zambia, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, who in the nick of another election was declared a citizen of Malawi and the case of Alhassan Quatara the current President of Cote D'Ivoire who once held the position of Prime Minister but was declared a foreigner at a time, are a few instances of the problem and politics of ethnic dramatization in Africa. Colonial and military incursions into the African body politic have fueled the flames of ethnicity, to the point that the concept of 'ethnicity' has come to be identified with the ignoble, backwardness, conflict and underdevelopment.

Let us note that ethnicity itself is as primordial as human evolution since people are born into specific cultures within certain political and geographical space. But why has this concept been used in such a way that it has become an albatross in our path to development, causing large scale conflicts that have resulted in the loss of human lives and the dissipation of economic and other resources

We cannot dispute the fact that conflicts have resulted in gross underdevelopment in most parts of the African continent. Looking at Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan, one cannot but experience horror at what ethnic conflicts have led to in those countries. And Nigeria is not an exception considering the country's civil war between 1967 and 1970, and the various skirmishes among various ethnic groups in Nigeria in recent times. Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola and Cote D'Ivoire, to mention a few more instances, show that ethnicity itself is the springboard for human and material destruction. The Hutus and Tutsis spread within Rwanda, Burundi, and Democratic Republic of Congo, have been engaged in conflicts which, within the last few decades, have resulted into millions of deaths. Yet there seems to be no end to such conflicts. Peace talks and negotiations seem to fail. In these kinds of situation, development can only exist in the imagination of the people not in actual experience.

Apart from the deaths and wanton destruction of life and property there has been stagnation in terms of human resources development as well as material development. The education of the children in particular has suffered. Scientific and technological advancement has also been truncated in most cases. The Sudanese case is a typical example. The war between the Khartoum Muslim/Arab led government and Southern Christian/Animist black led by John Garrang went on for as many as 21 years, with southern part of Sudan experiencing no development in both human and material spheres. The list of such stagnation in Africa cannot be exhausted.

We then ask: what are the causes of ethnic conflicts? Scholars of various shades of opinion have come up with different reasons for ethnic conflicts. Two major factors have been adduced for these conflicts. These are the control of political power and struggle over economic resources. The two are related in the sense that in a multi-

ethnic state, the group that controls the political power invariably controls the economic resources, whether or not the resources are found within the region of the dominant unit. These problems of control of political power and lopsided distribution of economic resources subsequently lead to marginalization of some groups or outright cheating of other groups in the allocation of resources by the authorities in control. This trend is noticeable in Liberia, Somalia, Nigeria, Sudan, Congo Rwanda and Burundi (see, Sumner, 1959; Ekeh, 1975; Nnoli, 1980).

The possibility of conflicts in a multi-ethnic society where there is injustice in the allocation of resources and the sharing of political power is very high, and this often leads to ethnocentrism, the tendency to project one's own group as the center of everything desirable while neglecting other groups. Such ethnocentrism often leads to deep-rooted prejudice on the part of both dominant and the dominated groups. G. W. Allport in his book, *The Nature of Prejudice* has outlined five types of behavior that are likely to be displayed by a prejudiced person to another: 1. negative remarks. This means that a person speaks disparagingly about the group that he dislikes. 2. avoidance. This means that a prejudiced person tries to shun anyone who does not belong to his group. 3. discrimination. This means that a prejudiced person often excludes members of the maligned group from certain types of employment, places of residence, or social privileges. 4. physical attack. The prejudiced person often becomes a party to violence, which is designed to intimidate the people he has come to hate. 5. extermination.

The prejudiced person often participates in lynching, massacres, or extermination programs (Allport cited in *Awake!*, Sept. 8, 2004: 5)

All these can be said to have featured in the Nazis' attack on the Jews in Germany in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the conflict in Yugoslavia and the crises in Burundi, Cote D'Ivoire and the Sudanese Darfur region where as at March 2005, 70,000 people had been killed and two million people displaced.

Apart from the reason stated above, colonialism and its consequences have been taken as another major factor responsible for the present ethnic-crisis situations in most parts of Africa.

Many other distinguished scholars have addressed the problem of ethnicity, federalism and power sharing within states in Africa so as to avoid incessant conflicts within the polity brought about largely by colonial configuration (see Osaghae, 1992a and 1992b; Suberu, 1994; Horowitz, 1994; Ake, 1996; Campbell, 1997; Adekanye, 1998; Ekeh, 2004)

According to Adekanye (1998) power-sharing is highly preferable to the majoritarian principle especially in deeply ethnically divided societies as we have in Africa. This is quite understandable, according to Adekanye, given the four basic characteristics of power-sharing according to Arendt Lijphart (1985). These are "Executive power-sharing among representatives of all significant groups; considerable internal autonomy for groups that wish it; proportional representation and proportional allocation of civil service positions and public funds; and the possibility of minority veto on vital questions" (Cited in Adekanye, 1998: 26)

Although these characteristic features of power-sharing are desirable, they may not work well in states with acute socio-economic inequalities. In other words,

following Lemarchand (1993), there is hardly any power-sharing arrangement that can survive the stresses generated by profound socio-economic inequalities (see Adekanye, 1998: 33). These socio-economic inequalities, for instance, have been responsible for the conflicts between the Tutsi and Hutus in Rwanda, culminating in the 1994 genocide that claimed not fewer than 800, 000 lives. There is much tension with regard to which group controls political power since this is a sure avenue to enjoying certain privileges.

The post-colonial situation, according to Ake (1996), has not been better than it used to be simply because political independence only resulted in some changes in the composition of state managers while the lop-sidedness of the state character remained the same as it was under colonialism. This no doubt intensified the ethnic struggles within most African states. In fact, the state continued to be totalistic in scope, constituting a statist economy. It presented itself as an apparatus of violence with a narrow social base. It also relied on coercion rather than authority for compliance (Ake, 1996: 3)

While most scholars are convinced about the negative consequences of ethnicity in African socio-political dispensation, a few others have attempted to trivialize the situation by seeing ethnicity as a purely invented phenomenon and, therefore, a myth which has been peddled most by colonialism (See Anderson, 1983; Appiah, 1992 and Owolabi, 2003).

According to Owolabi (2003: 6), if we accept the arguments of Anderson (1983) and Appiah (1992)—and he thinks we should—that identities are neither primordial nor natural but deliberately invented, then there is an urgent need for a deconstruction of ethnicity because of its overall negative effect in Africa. The forging of national identity is more desirable than the sustenance of fiction of ethnicity because, still according to Owolabi (2003), the nation-state is the only form of legal and legitimate identity and also because it is the most effective structure that can ensure the desired development in Africa.

Now the questions arise: Is it really possible to de-construct ethnicity? Is it possible, for example, for a Yoruba, an Igbo or a Hausa to see himself or herself first as a Nigerian before seeing himself or herself as Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa? Furthermore: What kind of nation-state are we talking about? Is it possible to gloss over ethnicity in the quest for nation-state, since, in the first instance, the concept of nation-state presupposes diverse ethnic groups who have come to accept certain values that bind them together as a people with a common destiny? Perhaps what we need to strive for is a nation-state that gives adequate recognition to ethnic groups and which also incorporates the principle of justice in organizing the diverse groups within the different nation-states in Africa (Oyeshile, 2005)

It is on the basis of the above that we want to agree with Owolabi (2003: 21) that there is a need for national integration in order to avoid the evils of ethnicity, and this integration can only be achieved if we resolve the problem of injustice, especially the problem of consistent marginalization of some groups within the polity. In fact: “The legitimacy, survival and integration of a nation-state depend on how far the state as a legal institution can perform its primary role of distributing benefits and burdens

among groups justifiably without any group feeling justifiably aggrieved” (Owolabi 2003: 22).

In achieving the goals of national integration, not only must justice be entrenched, there must also be a concerted attempt to eradicate poverty which has remained a major challenge for governance, especially democracy in most parts of Africa. The abject poverty in Africa coupled with other factors has affected the sense of community that helps in the sustenance of national consciousness.

### III. Community, Sense of Community or Community Consciousness

The question can be asked: why do we need community in the first place? And what do we really mean by sense of community or community consciousness? Though religious and ethnic identities have sometimes played crucial roles in the formation and existence of community, they are nevertheless auxiliary and subordinate to it. It is in fact the case that religious and ethnic identities have quite often undermined the notion of community in Africa, thereby obstructing national development and leading to differentiated and variegated citizenry that does not engender normative national interests.

The *Chambers 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dictionary* defines community as having to do with “common possession, or enjoyment; agreement, communion; commonness; people having common rights; a body of persons in the same locality; a body of persons leading a common life” (1983: 255). Based on that definition, the community could be regarded as the basis for the actualization of individual values, aspirations and goals. Anything that would hamper this objective, all in the name of individual and group differences, is conveniently checked by the communal might for the good of the individual himself and the community at large.

The compatibility of community and individual values starts from the premise that the individual who has imbibed the spirit of community voluntarily gives up certain personal rights in ensuring the continued survival of the community. There is an implicit acceptance by individual that he could only actualize his potentials within the community. This explains the reason some individuals are willing to sacrifice their lives for the survival of the community during famine, war and natural disasters (Oyeshile, 2006: 124). While the individuals cannot survive without the community, the community similarly needs its individual members for its own survival. This point is underscored by Hegel when he notes that “individual freedom can only be attained in a kind of rational ethical community” (Daly, 1994: xx). Hegel means by this that there is always an existent community for the individual since this is the only way his happiness can be guaranteed.

Sense of community is simply community spirit or consciousness, and this involves putting the community at the center of one’s activities. One of the reasons for the situation in Nigeria and many states in Africa is lack of a sense of community, of the community spirit or consciousness, required in modern nation-states. In other words, many of our leaders do not feel obligated to protect the state and the citizen in genuine manner and the citizens on their part do not even see the state as a community that can protect their interests.

According to A.E. Murphy “it is only in so far as a state is in some respects a community that it can morally obligate us in any way” (Drengson 1978, 347). In other words, the relationship between the citizens and the state entails some kind of mutuality. Thus, when we talk of the state as being a community, we imply a moral situation in which we naturally feel obligated to do all within our power to see to the survival of the state. For this reason, a “community”, according to Murphy, “is not just any group that influences the behavior of its members. It is a group whose members are related in a quite distinctive way, the way of moral understanding, and the group is a community in so far as they are thus related” (Murphy, 1978: 376)

In our present context, therefore, we are talking about a community that encompasses the political, economic, religious and social spheres, a community whose members are driven to work towards common goals that will ensure their continued survival and development. Our argument here is simply that we cannot engender the sense of community required in Africa that will redress our current social and political predicament without first tackling the antagonistic postures of interests in both the public and private spheres in most African states. I believe that it is when there is a proper alignment of these two spheres that we can start to tackle other developmental problems

The basis of our inability to achieve a sense of community is as a result of incompatible values which individuals exhibit in both private and public spheres. After all, both spheres are made up of individuals playing different roles (typical or actual) as occasions may demand. Furthermore, the conflict situation in both realms is the result of certain human factors, which though not peculiar to Africa, have had a deep-seated influence on Africa.

The first factor has to do with injustice among the major actors within countries in Africa. This could be as a result of the political marginalization of some ethnic groups within a state. Apart from the conflict this generates, the pressing need in such a situation would be for citizens who are either in control of state power or who are marginalized by the state to think more about what accrues to them especially through unconventional means. In such a situation, people think less about the public good. This trend, as I earlier pointed out, is aptly captured in Ekeh’s (1975; 1980) analyses of “two cultures and two publics” in which the public servant exhibits double morality when it comes to probity. For instance, his tribesmen would see a public servant who happens to defraud his country a hero. However, if such a person were to do this to his tribal community, he would be treated as an outcast. With this kind of attitude, one can hardly experience the development of a sense of community. Although we are not unaware of the damage done to our body politic by the colonial incursion with undue balkanization of the African people, we still like to suggest that several decades after our political independence we have not yet developed the required sense of community needed to enhance social and political development.

The unprecedented level of poverty in most African countries, many studies have revealed, is not necessarily due to lack of human, material and natural resources; rather it is due to the “self” syndrome of many African leaders who loot their nations’ treasury with reckless abandon. In a situation of want in the midst of plenty, the majority of Africans in their bid to survive have responded in Darwinian ways to the

Hobbesian imperative (Oyeshile, 2003:81). In this kind of situation facing many citizens in African countries the moral pedigree required to develop a sense of community will not be available. It is thus not surprising to hear that some African leaders are indeed richer than their countries. Poverty has led to over dependency on a few individuals who are on government payroll and hold political appointments. This has in turn bred corruption. This is one major reason that many regional and continental bodies, such as the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and defunct OAU (Organization of African Unity), recorded dismal failure or little success in dealing with the African predicaments. Even the renewed attempt by some African leaders to tackle the African crisis through the formation of alternative bodies such as NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) and AU (African Union) coupled with Peer Review Mechanism can only succeed if the moral question is taken seriously. It is on this moral basis that the objective of NEPAD, designed as an "African package to the international community in return for increased aids, investment, debt relief and trade opportunities ... involving African States committing themselves to democracy, good governance and peace", can be realized (*Post express*, Sept. 1, 2002: 26)

Let us note at this juncture that most of the attempts at tackling the challenge of ethnicity through federalism and constitutional reforms have achieved partial successes because vast majority of citizens in many African states are poor and are ready to compromise democratic principles in trade off for means of survival. Furthermore, ethnic consciousness is promoted at the expense of national consciousness because the lifeline is mainly provided through ethnic loyalty. Invariably, ethnic identities will remain an obstacle to democracy as long as national consciousness is subordinate to ethnic consciousness.

#### IV. Poverty as a Major Obstacle to Democracy in Africa

The discourse of poverty is so expansive that it can aptly summarize the causes and effects of Africa's underdevelopment as internal and external factors have contributed to poverty in Africa. Naturally people will want to survive before any other thing. Perhaps this buttresses Jean-Paul Sartre's claim that 'existence precedes essence'. Survival, both in its qualitative and quantitative terms, has become a major issue that defines existence in Africa. Many scholars have given various definitions about poverty. The common thread within these definitions is that poverty is lack of the essentially things for qualitative and quantitative survival.

Whether as adults or children, when we experience lack of basic necessities of life such as food, good health, clothing, a conducive atmosphere for human habitation and inability to access those fundamental instruments, such as education, that will give us easy access to the basic necessities of life, then we are experiencing poverty. According to Akinyele, 'poverty has many dimensions but has to do in terms of an individual falling behind in some standard of minimum requirements for his or her wellbeing' (Akinyele, 2005:3). Going by 1995 world summit for Social development in Copenhagen and the Millennium Development Goals of 2000, poverty is construed in a multi-dimensional way. Again as Akinyele intimates, relying on the findings of

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1997, the concepts of human development and human poverty are related to give the definition of poverty as “deprivation in the most essential capacities of life including participating fully in the life of the community” (Akinyele, 2005: 3). This invariably means those who are poverty-stricken cannot participate in decision making of their society. By logical implication, such people cannot participate in democracy that is supposed to make them active members of the public sphere

In similar vein, Raphael Akanmidu suggests that poverty is related to starvation, destitution, hunger and sufferings of different forms. It is in this sense that poverty can rightly be described “as a form of human suffering and a state of lacking the means to exist adequately (Akanmidu, 1995: 44). He states further that poverty constitutes a major form of crisis that is habitual as it conveys a message of hardship that cannot be denied since there is visible misery, persistent destitution, endemic hunger or starvation and visible malnutrition (Akanmidu, 2004: 3

Although poverty is multi-dimensional, one can talk about absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty is a condition of life characterized by inability to meet or access basic needs of life such as food, clothing, shelter and health care. It is a condition of extreme lack. Akanmidu says that people in this category are hungry but have no food to eat, sick but lack resources for medical treatment and so forth (Akanmidu, 2004:3; Akinyele, 2005:3). Relative poverty has to do with the inability to meet adequately the basic needs of life. Poverty could also be material or mental or both. It is material when a person lacks the resources needed to procure the essentials of life needed for survival. It is mental when the state of mind is unhealthy and poor such that the mind internalizes lack that makes it to subvert the existing order for the benefit of the self alone

According to Yomi Kazeem (2019), 86.9 Million Nigerians now live in extreme poverty and this figure represents almost half of the Nigerian population. The following represents the poverty levels in some African countries as at June, 2018: Nigeria, 86.9 million 46.7 percent; Democratic Republic of Congo, 60.9 million, 77 percent; Ethiopia 23.9 million, 23.4 percent; Tanzania 19.9 million, 35 percent; Mozambique, 17.8 million, 61.8 percent; Kenya, 14.7 million, 30 percent; Uganda, 14.2 million, 34.2 percent and South Africa, 13.8 million, 24.6 percent of the population

Some of the major causes of poverty range from natural factors such as climate, geography and history to man-made factors such as bad or deficient governance, poor education, and unemployment. According to Akinyele, deficient governance may exhibit the following features: entrenched corruption, lack of respect for human rights, weak institutions and inefficient bureaucracies, lack of social cohesion and lack of political will to undertake reforms (Akinyele, 2005, 6). Among these factors listed, governance plays a crucial role and that is why one can easily establish an interface between poverty and democracy. This is best captured by Confucius who is quoted as saying that: “in a country well-governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of” (Akinyele, 2005: 6). According to Bill Houston, “when governance and leadership fails and the centre does not hold, at whatever level in society, things fall

apart. This is the inescapable conclusion to why Africa is so poor” (Houston, 2009: 12)

I am not examining the issue of poverty as an economist or a development expert as I am not trained in any of the fields. My involvement is just like the ordinary citizen who knows what poverty is in human life and has also experienced poverty in one way or the other or close to the people who experience it in qualitative and quantitative terms. It is on this basis—as a social philosopher—that I engage in the interrogation of poverty in relation to democracy and multi-ethnic identities in Africa. Poverty from what has been adumbrated above has to do with all situations that prevent humans from achieving the goals of freedom, autonomy, choice and access to social and primary goods through which they can actualize their potentials. These goals are democratic in nature in the first instance. Unemployment, violence, corruption, child abuse, election fraud, gender violence and lack of tolerance for the other are constituents of poverty that have set the African continent backward. These manifest in both physical lack and mental lack. It is then the case that human anxiety is not heightened by the fear of death and quest for immortality (Miguel Unamuno, 1954) as such but mainly by the phenomenon of poverty, a situation of lack of basic goods and conditions for human existence. The task of combatting poverty has become a Sisyphean one as all attempts seem to falter in realizing their set objectives. We can imagine the stone of poverty rolling back and back from the summit of alleviation. This situation is best described in Yoruba philosophy as *ise ati osi* (that is, poverty and disease). This poverty level is now manifested in self-imposed slavery. According to Sogolo

As P. L. O Lumumba, the Kenya Professor of Law, recently remarked, Africa has moved from the era when our fathers resisted being forcefully carried away to Europe and America as slaves, to the current situation where our able bodied young men and women now gratuitously offer themselves as slaves to be taken away to the same foreign lands. Just as slaves died, in their hundreds and were dumped in the sea, African youths are also dying in droves in the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea (Sogolo, 2019:2)

This scenario, according to Sogolo, indicates a total collapse of self-esteem and loss of faith in both the state and the Nigerian society (Sogolo, 2019: 2). This is just a minute instance of the self-degradation which Africans are going through on daily basis. In fact, many Africans apart from advancing arguments for outsourcing leadership in many African states are also calling for the recolonization of Africa. According to this group, the period of colonial occupation was far better than the situation in many African countries. At least, during the colonial period hard work counted but this is no longer the case. This situation has led to various posers and questions. For instance, Bill Houston asks, “Africa is not poor because its people do not work hard. Few people work harder than rural African women. Why then is Africa so poor?” (Houston, 2009:1)

The unprecedented level of poverty in most African countries, as many studies have revealed, is not necessarily due to lack of human, material and natural resources; rather it is due to the ‘self-syndrome’ of many African leaders who loot their national treasury with reckless abandon. In a situation of want in the midst of plenty, the



majority of Africans in their bid to survive respond in Darwinian ways to the Hobbesian imperative (Oyeshile, 2003: 81). Invariably in this kind of situation facing many citizens in African countries the moral pedigree required to function in a democratic sphere will always be in short supply. It is thus not surprising to note that some African leaders are indeed richer than their countries, with most of their investments and stolen riches in foreign lands for the benefit of the foreigners while their own people continue to live in penury.

The spillover of poverty cannot be exhausted. Poverty has led to over dependency on a few individuals who are on government payroll and hold political appointments. With much pressure on these people, the likely outcome is corruption which is a form of mental poverty. One can thus see the nexus between material poverty and mental poverty. It is then easy to adduce reasons why many sub-continental and continental bodies such as the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and defunct OAU (Organisation of African Unity), saddled with the task of African development, have not succeeded much or recorded dismal failure in dealing with the African predicament. Again, the renewed attempt by African leaders to tackle the African crisis through the formation of alternative bodies such as AU (African Union) and its organ NEPAD (New partnership for Africa's Development) which is saddled with peer review mechanism can only succeed if the moral question is taken seriously.

More fundamentally, as our discussion has elicited, poverty endangers democratic principles and consolidate ethnic loyalty against national interest. In this case, the leaders of the state would have abandoned the sacred obligation of the state to the citizens such as security, provision of enabling environment for the actualization of human potentials and freedom, and the provision of primary goods without which life will be solitary, poor, brutish, short and nasty to borrow from Thomas Hobbes. In the instance of state failure, leading to unprecedented poverty. The citizens not only turn back to ethnic nationalities and criminalities for succor, they also embrace religious paternalism in various ways given vent to the misuse of religion and religious space. I will explain further on this.

#### V. The Religious Quest

Human life is replete with various kinds of tendencies. The tendency to be happy and sad, to be fulfilled and unfulfilled, to be rich and poor, to live a life of good health and bad health, short life or long life and so forth. All human cultures try to come to terms with these tendencies which the existentialists regard as absurdity of human existence. The absurdities could be man-made or imposed on man. The latter is referred to as facticity of human existence. One of the ways to explain these absurdities and cope with them is through religion. In the Holy Scriptures, religion came up as a kind of relationship between God and man. This is to enable man cope with the miseries or absurdities of life.

Before delving more into the religious quest, let us look at some of the motivations for religion in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. One, religion serves as a means to salvation and an antidote against the absurdities of life. Two, religion could

also serve as a means of livelihood to practitioners. These days, various religions generate a lot of income which serve to sustain practitioners and social groups in such areas as education, health care, social support and furthering parochial political interests. Three, religion can also serve as the basis for determining the rights and (perhaps in qualified form) duties of citizens to themselves and to the nation. In Nigeria and many other African states, religion has become a paradigm for national stake in terms of political and economic space. Let us then go back to the religious quest, this first motivation of religion in order to assess religion and the basis for determining rights and duties.

In our everyday life, much as we derive happiness and joy from some activities so do, we experience sadness and sorrow on a daily basis. This it-self prompts one, if one rejects suicide, to search for answers or solutions to causes of sadness or sorrow and sustain happiness and joy. The religious quest is, perhaps, one of the oldest methods of confronting some of these challenges. What then is religion? Many scholars have attempted various definitions of religion. Even those that are not literate in the western sense also have a conception of religion that they employ from time to time (Oyeshile, 2015)

The following examples are some of the ways that religion has been defined or described: John Hick (1994: 2) quoting the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines religion “as human recognition of a superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God or gods entitled to obedience or worship”. In this definition, we see that religion arises because the human agent recognizes his limitations and therefore defers to a supreme force to whom he submits so as to get certain problems resolved. Perhaps, this gives support to Miguel De Unamuno’s position that man is preoccupied often about the question of God because he is preoccupied about himself, his own existence, the meaning of his life and especially what would happen to him hereafter (Omogbe, 1983: 1).

A major fact that needs pointing out is that man’s quest for survival leads to the religious quest among other quests. Of course, there are a number of contentions regarding the defining elements of religion—for instance, the issues of transcendentalism or supernaturalism, a Supreme Being or deity, religious experience and religious attitude. All these are very germane to our understanding of religion, are nevertheless not the focus of this paper. To reiterate the centrality of the problem of man to religion, Omogbe is of the view that we are inundated in an anthropocentric theology in which God, who is central to almost all religions, is seen and studied only in relation to man’s situation. It is not farfetched therefore to assert that “it is the problem of man that leads to the problem of God” (Omogbe, 1983: 1). Furthermore, because the problem of man is linked to the problem of God, it would be impossible to practice any religion without some anthropomorphic concepts such as praying, singing and dancing because it is assumed that God listens, hears and is happy also. Religion plays a crucial role in the life of Africans. This tendency has sometimes led to the assertion that “Africans are in all things religious” or the claim that Africans are an “incurably religious people” (Idowu, 1962; Mbiti, 1969; Opoku, 1978). All that can be predicated of man can be traced to his source of being, which is God. According to Omoyajowo, “it could be validly asserted that in Africa man believes

that he owes his origin to God. The African believes that the Supreme God is the creator of man and the Determiner of his destiny” (1975: 37). It is then easy to see why all problems, if not traced to God are taken to God for solution through various religious practices. For emphasis, the issue of destiny or predestination plays a very prominent role in many African cultures. The Yoruba believe, for instance, that it is generally the destiny that a person brings from heaven that he comes to fulfill on earth. Given the above, it is not surprising that Omoyajowo has observed as follows regarding religion and African culture:

As a matter of fact, the general foundation of the tradition of Africa is the spiritual view of life. To every African, the spiritual world is not only a reality; it is also very near; and so, the idea of the deity as first and ultimate cause of this is very prominent everywhere in Africa. In this way we can understand why the African believes that every man has a place in the world and that his destiny is fixed from above (Omoyajowo, 1975: 37-38).

Furthermore, religion can also result in a number of mixed influences on society. According to Akinola again:

In the individual, it can inspire the noblest spiritual values and selflessness, while facilitating a disposition for contemplating, or for experiencing intimations of, ultimate reality, perhaps. Unfortunately, it can also promote or encourage base elements in the character of men, such as hypocrisy, charlatanism, obscurantism and fanaticism. Religion can thus be responsible for some of the worst tendencies in societies and peoples, including sectarianism, discord and conflict (Akinola, 2005: 2)

The state of disequilibrium engendered by the abuse of religion in national life is due to several factors, ranging from the lack of respect for the secular nature of the Nigerian state to corruption, election fraud, disunity poverty and ethnicity.

Religious identity has taken dangerous dimension in Nigeria, not because of our colonial experience, but largely as a result of failure of government and deficit governance. This has also resulted in unreasonable pursuit of religious faith at the expense of rational planning.

It is a fact that many states in Africa, including Nigeria until recently, have failed to provide meaningful governance that will alleviate the problems of their citizens. This failure is also reflected in institutions that are supposed to assist in the implementation of government policies thereby presenting a haphazard unstructured ways of combating challenges of life. When the kinship support fails as a result of overwhelming pressure, the next outlet is the religious centers where social support is guaranteed the people on the basis of miracles and unending prayers. Pathetically, government at its own level also commits solution to national problems into the hands of God without any rational planning. It is little wonder then that many governments in Nigeria will opt for prayers in Jerusalem and Mecca instead of adopting realistic policies to resolve problems. This subsequently substitutes belief in the sense of faith for reason in national life.

Therefore the upsurge in irrational adherence to religious dogmas can be traced to lack of responsible and responsive state apparatus including deficit leadership that has left the citizens to endless struggle for survival without any concerted effort on the part of the state to play its role of promoting welfare and security for the populace. Lawuyi capture this scenario when he states that “With the failure of the state to provide essential services, the belief in the civil society is that personal and collective problems can be solved religiously by prayers rather than by reason, by rituals sacrifices rather than by hard work, or by material means, that is, by the creation of tools and ‘connections’ to serve specific purpose of self-preservation” (Lawuyi, 1991: 232)

Apart from providing refuge for the citizens as a result of state’s inaction, the religious attitude also provides a source of exploitation for the religious leaders under various nomenclatures. On this, Lawuyi notes further that:

This attitude provides money for faith healers, the magicians, and the juju priests – those who place premiums on the commercial value of religious practice and promote the advertisement of self-potential, and of group therapy. Religion becomes a commercial enterprise. One in which there is hardly any ethnic over or under tones since, no matter the identity of the client, the service rendered by the religious patrons is the embodiment of the value of their faith and solutions to the problems of social deprivation (1991: 232)

Following from the position of Lawuyi, it is obvious that the phenomenon of social deprivation is as a result of failure of states which can also be hinged primarily on bad leadership. Reflecting on the problem of leadership in Africa, Olusegun Oladipo argues that leadership in Africa has been inundated with self-seeking tendency and the inability to use political power for the benefit of the people. He laments further: Therefore, given this situation, it should be no surprise that democracy has not been able to realize its transformational potential in most African countries. A leadership that is self-centered, lacks the commitment to African emancipation in all its ramifications and is indifferent to the outcome of its policies cannot provide the kind of enabling environment for the release of people’s energies and the mobilization of efforts for innovative and creative development (Oladipo, 2006: 48).

Although religion has often played welfare roles from the past, these roles have now been subjected to a lot of abuse due to poverty. In Nigeria, the paternalistic roles of the state declined, especially in the 1980s with the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). This period also led to the emergence of Pentecostalism, with the attendant welfare programs by the churches in the areas of education, health, employment and so forth. The likely consequences of the state failing in its obligations to the citizens include diminished or divided loyalty to the state, increased ethnic loyalty, religious fundamentalism and lack of belief in the state in fulfilling its statutory roles in society, the strengthening of the primordial or tribal public and the weakening of the civic public and lastly ,the flight of reason and abuse of rights of persons under the guise of religious paternalism as being experienced in many societies in Africa. Angela U. Oriakhi on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2019, wrote on a

Facebook thus: “Until Nigeria has more industries than religious houses, until people stay awake on research than vigils, Nigeria will remain poor.” One should note that this attitude is a fall out of the failure of the state to address poverty. The scenario described above manifests poverty at both the material and mental levels

Related to African countries’ pretense to democracy are economic reforms based on false application of liberal capitalist economic principles. Many African leaders, though professing capitalist economic arrangements, nevertheless gloss over the welfarist principle of a capitalist economic agenda, which would alleviate mass poverty. For instance, many programs on poverty alleviation, especially in Nigeria such as the “Better Life Programme for Women and Children”, “Peoples Bank Small Scale Loan Project” and many such others have not ameliorated the plight of the people. This is because a few individuals, who fortuitously found themselves in power, have appropriated and mismanaged funds meant for such projects. This is also an indication that common good holds no meaning for these individuals. In recent times, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in Nigeria has exposed many a government official who has looted the nation’s treasury at the local, state and federal levels

My argument precisely is that, although poverty exists in one form or the other in all continents of the world, its level in Africa is unprecedented as the African continent visibly manifests both absolute and relative notions of poverty. Given this scenario, democracy and democratic principles can only succeed partially or in the imagination of the people because the state and her resources will continue to be plundered and therefore giving little or no space for democracy to flourish. Furthermore, another major obstacle to democracy in Africa is the struggle among her multi-ethnic identities. This scenario will continue because there is dearth of national consciousness or loyalty, instead primordial or ethnic interests are promoted in all ramifications.

#### Conclusion:

##### A Case for a Welfare State in Africa and a Narrative of Inclusiveness

The most crucial aspect of any philosophical work is proposing a solution or solutions to identified problems. As a matter of fact, philosophers are always at home when it comes to recognizing problems and that is why they can never be found wanting of raising questions at any given point. Some have even said that problems are more important than answers in philosophy. I must confess that I have raised several questions in this paper, but the task will not be complete without advancing some solutions, which in themselves may also constitute some problems. I have proposed a welfare state and a narrative of inclusiveness as the basis for resolving the challenge of poverty and help to stem the tide of ethnic crisis which has worked against the full democratization of African states.

The outline of this argument has been fleshed out in Oyeshile and Oladebo (2019, 232). In the latter work, the idea of ‘libertarian paternalism’ was advanced. In line with that framework, I am suggesting that “African states employ a command structure that will set developmental objectives whilst simultaneously maintaining a

liberal attitude which we believe best motivates individual and creative geniuses” (*ibid.*). To be sure, this idea is rooted in extant indigenous political philosophies of indigenous African societies such as the Yoruba—as I have earlier noted. This indigenous political philosophy is what I brand ‘African socialism’ and its attendant economic and political values. This African socialist political theory, “is a potpourri of liberal and paternalist values” (*ibid.*). In the ultimate analysis, it is my well-considered opinion that such a political worldview as the one I have in mind, above, will best mitigate against the ills of identity conflicts and economic poverty these states of Africa have hitherto been enmeshed and help pave way for the emergence of a true welfare state

A welfare state, to emphasize, is a state that takes the rights of the citizens as a top priority by providing those enabling conditions that will engender not the security of lives and properties, but also provide the conducive environment for the actualization of human potentials. Again, such an arrangement must be based on a ‘philosophy of inclusiveness’ that is the foundation of African communal system. This communal system must be critical in the sense of not making privileges possible, it must also emphasize responsibility on the part of members. How then can we achieve this framework being proposed, especially given the fact that many of such proposals have been advanced in the past? I strongly believe that the starting point is leadership. African states need proactive leadership that is propelled by the welfare of the people not a select few, who are mostly the elites. But the question that will be asked is: How do we get the right leadership given the fact that there is an ‘elite gang up,’ ‘international collusion,’ ‘constitutive interests’ at the ethnic and religious levels? The problem of leadership can be resolved through mass education of the people who can easily discern the options in leadership and choose a viable alternative. Given the conscientization of the people, the people are better prepared for mass action when necessary through the civil societies or other bodies. Therefore, education holds the major key to alleviating poverty in many African states. To educate must be to nurture individuals into particular community of which they are members and this will invariably help to build the right kind of citizenship that will advance the interest of the community (Ilesanmi, 2017: 21). Leadership must also be guided by a philosophy of action that makes it possible for leaders to take the best interest on behalf of their people, knowing fully well that they are holding power in trust. Africa has had a lot of contention with leadership. According to Bayo Okunade

Leadership is a concept with wide application. It applies to all categories of human collectivities-groups, organizations, or societies etc., both formal and informal. Indeed, it is one of the intrinsic elements for efficient and effective management and administration and it is very important in setting and attaining organizational goals (Okunade, 2008:14).

Having the right kind of political leadership will also embody being subject to the constitution and being a public servant. Okunade remarks further that “Ideally, political leaders are supposed to be public servants who want to serve the people they lead. Like leadership, a good political leader requires a vision which is the hardest

part of leadership, courage and a willingness to make bold moves and must be careful in choice of options and be prepared” (Okunade, 2008: 17).

I make bold to say that African continent has more than enough theories on development both exogenous and endogenous. The problem has always been with the leadership as a single most important factors among all other factors. Arising from this is a need to build a philosophy of national consciousness in which the idealism of national interest will be the defining feature. In achieving this kind of philosophy, the needs of the citizens must be reckoned with and given priority always. A person will only be loyal to a system if the system protects the life and property of the person in such a way that such an individual can live fully his or her potentialities

Africa must also develop a realistic economic philosophy which will take into consideration the capitalist economic principles as well as African communal life. There must be an integration of both systems as a full launch into the capitalist economic system is likely to further empower the rich at the expense of the poor. It is this kind of arrangement that will engender a welfare state and a narrative of interdependence. While fully aware of the communal economic arrangement in Africa, Ali Mazrui emphasizes the need for self-sufficiency when he notes that:

Self-development includes defining goals in relation to available means and cultivating the will to pursue those goals with as much reliance as possible. Excessive dependence on outsiders is part of the imperial malaise and Africa should seek ways to transcend it (Mazrui, 1980:7).

Going back to the African communal philosophy, we must truly reflect this philosophy in our attitude and orientation, not to encourage laziness and over dependency, but to ensure that as Africans we have obligations to one another to ensure survival in a world largely determined by market forces or what some will refer to as the invisible hand. Communalism, as a philosophy of inclusiveness/interdependence, is a major factor that gives hope and belongingness to Africans in a highly industrialized capitalist society in which material wealth is placed above human and humane values. There is need to be conscious of the fact that collective survival is an imperative that should be promoted in Africa. Furthermore, African citizens must strive for the right leadership by participating fully in the electoral process instead of remaining apathetic. They must ensure that the leaders are accountable and constantly promote a sense of community necessary for collective survival by invoking the democratic instruments to ensure that leaders conform to rules of engagement in politics.

The basic argument of this paper is that democracy, taken as a desirable form of government because it promotes participation, accountability and the rule of law, thereby providing the basis for human development, can and will only flourish in Africa if one of the major challenges to it, that is, the consciousness of multi-ethnic identities is down-played and national identity is promoted. This will only be possible if another obstacle to democracy, that is, poverty among Africans is addressed. Poverty, a situation of material lack and mental lack, has been a major threat to democracy in Africa because it re-invigorates ethnic loyalty in place of national

loyalty and thereby diminishing the sense of community that is imperative in democratic society.

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