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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# AFRICA'S DEMOCRACIES: A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, attempts have been made to show that true democracies constitute one of the major aspirations of the African people. Democracy is growing in Africa and there is ample evidence that some gains have been made in many countries namely: Tanzania, South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, etc. However, the practice of democratic system of governance has been a difficult exercise sometimes involving bloody conflicts in African nations. In this discourse, there are contentious postulations but the fact is that we have serious problems, both social and political, that pertain to human frailties, in-transparency, 'negative' ethnicity, corruption, distrust, bad leadership and electoral problems, which must be bridled through our collective efforts towards vibrant democracies in the continent. The paper opens by admitting that democracy is growing in Africa. However, it is noted that democracy is context-oriented. This fact forms the basis of the discussions that ensue onwards. A critique of African notions of democracy is made. The paper also critically analyses the relationship between liberty as a promise of democracy and democracy itself. It also examines the yearning for true democracy in light of limiting factors such as negative ethnicity and naive electorates. Upon these are conclusions and recommendations made.

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## INTRODUCTION

Democracy is practiced in different ways by many countries in contemporary times. When it is properly practiced, its benefits trickle down to the citizenship of a state. In this discourse, democracy in Africa has been examined with a view to showing some of the trends in Africa's political affairs that detract from our high hopes, aspirations and confidence in democratic government. This article is not intended to discount the value of democracy to individual growth, self-fulfilment and national development. It does not assert that democracy in Africa is nonsense. It does not claim that democracy is neither unfit nor impracticable among the vast majority of African people. Rather, there are attempts in this presentation to highlight some factual socio-political attitudes that pertain to philosophical criticisms of democracy, which arguably, characterize the practice of democracy in contemporary Africa. Democracy itself is an idea of a good form of polity which is not achieved, once and for all, through a constitutional establishment of democratic government and rights. We are always in the process of achieving this ideal form of government and political culture which we hopefully believe to be democracy. In this process there are numerous challenges we must grapple with diligently in order to attract to ourselves, individually and collectively, the great benefits of democracy. That is why this article attempts to contend, based

on the African experience, that democracy is something much more than a promulgation of liberty, equality, justice and the like, by the constitution of a democratic state. It is a way of life permeated by a high sense of morality and tolerance involving both the electorates and elected leaders in the practice of democratic political culture.

Many scholars have expressed similar views about democracy indicating that it is not a finished product. Individuals and nations keep evolving towards it as an ideal and it is undermined by myriads of problems and challenges, sometimes due to delayed reforms for creating institutional mechanisms that address some democratic needs and values. Therefore, there are different standards of democracy to which different contemporary democratic nations have attained. There are countries at advanced stages of democracy while there are others at rudimentary levels. This brings to the fore the issues pertinent to undemocratic practices in African States that lend weight, for example, to Plato's critique of democracy. On the one hand, substantial gains have been made by Africans towards democracy with concrete examples and evidence. On the other hand, we do not know whether Africa's democracies are moving forward or backward. They are seemingly moving backward, if we use the standards in some countries such as France, Germany, U.K. and Japan among others as parameters for inference.

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Of course, democracy is growing in Africa and some gains have been made in some countries namely Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Uganda. However, many other African states that claim to be democratic appear to be drowning in the process. The postulations advanced in this discourse are quite contentious but one thing is clear: we have serious problems, both social and political, that pertain to human frailties and distrust which we must strive to surmount in order to promote vibrant democracies.

### Notions of Democracy

John Dewey (1859-1958) American educator and philosopher of Pragmatism, aptly points out that: ... democracy is much broader than a special political form, a method of conducting government, of making laws and carrying on governmental administration by means of popular suffrage and elected officers. It is that, of course. But it is something broader and deeper than that. The political and governmental phase of democracy is a means for realizing ends that lie in the wide domain of human relationships and the development of human personality (John Dewey 1999:504).

Democracy is much more than applying the principle of majority in electoral affairs and legislations. It is more or less a way of living; a way of leadership that must be nurtured through education and moral behaviour. Here, Dewey's view concurs with that of Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) German existentialist philosopher and theologian, who also understands democracy as that which is not simply constituted by, nor exhausted in concrete modes of praxis and participation (Chris Thornhill, 2002:185). For Jaspers, most importantly, democracy provides a pedagogic order of culture, morality, liberty and humanity around which the ideas of citizens must orient themselves (ibid). Both Jaspers and Dewey acknowledge that democracy is the best form of governance that human wit has devised so far. It is a political form that rests upon the idea that no individual or limited set of individuals should be considered wise enough or good enough to rule others without their consent. Therefore every adult must participate directly or indirectly in social and political affairs of the state (Dewey, 1999:504). Arguably, most people would prefer to embrace democratic form of polity because of the liberty it provides to all citizens. In this context, Jaspers posits that democracy has merits over all other forms of government because it creates the democratic space "in which human thinking is able to develop its own resources of tolerance, culture and responsibility" (Thornhill, 2002:182). This means that true democracy forms a social milieu in which human thinking can avoid all totalizing doctrines, and in which it can disclose its own inner possibilities in non-regulated, relative processes of interpretation, interaction and discursive exchange (Thornhill, 2002:182).

### Liberty and Democracy

Raphael (1992:83) duly observes that the distinctive feature of democracy, as most people understand it in the western world, is that it aims at securing maximum liberty for citizens. What is liberty? Is liberty without limits? Is the abuse of liberty associated with the problems of political leadership in many of Africa's democratic and non-democratic states? Raphael

points out succinctly that for most democrats, liberty must go hand in hand with equality, and they believe that every individual or at least every adult is capable of exercising the power of self-direction and should be given the opportunity to do so (Raphael, 1992:83). This engenders another question: is it true in practical life that every adult is capable of exercising the power of self-direction in political affairs that can improve democracy in Africa? Let us attempt to examine Plato's concerns in light of the practice of democracy in Africa. In this way we are able to assess the extent to which his concerns are evident and how we can chart the way forward to bridle those undesirable attitudes in our democratic states. Plato (429-347 BC) criticized liberty as one of the aims of democracy not because he did not wish that citizens should enjoy this form of freedom. He did not mean that oppression should prevail instead of liberty (Stumpf, 1982:72-73). Plato was not sure enough that most humans have become sufficiently enlightened to perceive the limits of liberty in a truly democratic setting. This contention will attain clarity as we ponder upon the following question: is Plato's reason for criticizing liberty evident in the practice of democracy in Africa and elsewhere? One can respond affirmatively. There is ample evidence in Africa and around the world to show that liberty has been grossly abused in different ways by the leadership and electorate in many nations practicing democracy.

The refusal to relinquish power and authority by some African presidents who may have lost in a competitive electoral process, arguably, is an expression of the so-called liberty which democracy applauds. Moreover, most African political leaders with ministerial positions often defy the *will* of the people to step down when charged with corruption. This is the sort of liberty which Plato was against and that is not the liberty which we truly need. We do not need the liberty we experience from some of our political leaders which become tantamount to oppression and authoritarianism. In general and presidential elections most incumbents find their way back to power at any cost. In 2010, Rwanda, Sudan, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire held elections in which many questions remain unanswered. Hopefully, in 2011, about 12 African countries may hold general and presidential elections. These include Uganda, Nigeria, Zambia, Chad, D. R. Congo, Cameroon and Central African Republic. In view of the emerging trend of political standoff over election results, hence the trend towards coalition governments, we cannot predict the outcome of presidential elections of Africa's democracies. The disputed presidential election of 28<sup>th</sup> November 2010 in Cote d'Ivoire could not be resolved by the joint efforts of the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The ousted president Laurent Gbagbo, known to have been defeated according to election results declared by the Electoral Commission, refused to concede defeat. Instead, he continued hanging on to power until he was captured and ousted on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2011 by the military troops loyal to Alassane Ouattara, the legitimate winner of the presidential elections (The Standard, 12/4/2011:36). Is this the liberty that democracy advocates? What's more, during the political standoff, the two presidential candidates, Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara, surprisingly were sworn-in by different authorities as elected presidents of Cote d'Ivoire---creating a tense situation comparable to having two captains in one ship. Nevertheless, this is liberty by definition yet at the same time a

form of corruption and mockery of the practice of democracy in Africa.

The Electoral Commission of Cote d'Ivoire declared Alassane Quattara, a presidential candidate and leader of the opposition the winner with 54 per cent of the vote against Gbagbo's 46 per cent (The Standard, 6/1/2011:4). As usual in African democracies, the supporters of Gbagbo quickly alleged that there had been massive vote-rigging, thus the Constitutional Council, headed by a staunch ally of Gbagbo, proceeded to announce that Gbagbo had won the 2010 presidential election (The Standard, 6/1/2011). The use of government machinery to create confusion about election results is evolving into a common feature of our democracies. The calculated attempt to engender confusion is not an isolated African experience. In Beijing, China, the state news agency Xinhua wrote that the Cote d'Ivoire crisis shows democracy's flaws. The agency contends that the political chaos in Cote d'Ivoire indicates that democracy is not necessarily the way forward for developing countries as portrayed by the West (The Standard, 20/1/2011:33). It criticized the West for forcing democracy on countries--arguing that in 1990 due to the influence and pressure from Western nations Cote d'Ivoire imported Western style democracy and held multi-party presidential elections. The country since then has suffered political instability and occasional bloody conflicts, which has caused economic stagnation (The Standard, 20/1/2011:33). It is hard to determine who won presidential elections in some African countries in recent years. In June 1993, no one could identify who won the annulled presidential elections in Nigeria. The 2007 general and presidential elections in Kenya crystallized into a crisis that garnered the concerted efforts of the international community to resolve. This was followed by the 2008 general and presidential elections in Zimbabwe in which we do not know who won the presidency. It was marred by confusion. It was difficult to believe the figures for popular votes declared for both incumbent president Robert Mugabe and his rival Morgan Tsvangirai in the first and a run-off presidential election. Unfortunately, in all these instances, many lives and property were destroyed.

Concerning democracy in Africa, Kwasi Wiredu (1999) makes a significant observation that needs to be stated at this juncture: that in modern African democracies, opposition often becomes obstruction, as it strives to prevent government from carrying through any relevant policies. Simultaneously, for many governments, opposition frequently means obstruction; hence many democratic regimes try to exercise authority in a way that indicates they are not, either temperamentally or constitutionally, given to pay attention to the opposition (Kwasi Wiredu, 1999:37). There is no doubt it accounts for some unpleasant political developments we experience in many African democracies. At the background of the unjust clamour for power is the question of liberty which was a matter of concern to Plato. We must note unmistakably that liberty is not something negative in itself but it is the motive and how we express liberty in action that permit us to raise questions about it. Liberty when properly expressed is bound to promote individual growth and socio-cultural development. But it is the frequent blatant abuse of liberty, especially by the political leadership, that adversely circumscribes individual growth and collective well-being of citizens of a state.

In every truly democratic set-up no individual including the president and all political elites in power and authority is "above the law". This implies that the president, his words, actions or deeds must be within the limits of the constitution. In this context, Fredrick O. Wanyama (2000:31) asserts: Unfortunately, the African presidency seems to be the direct opposite of such constitutional presidencies. Not all African presidencies are created through direct popular vote as there are cases where some leaders have 'captured' power through the gun and declared themselves "president". It has also been impossible to constitutionally regulate the powers of the African president and hence, emerging as the most powerful institution in the land. As Wanyama duly observes there are many African countries where the presidencies were originally captured with force. Libya, Uganda, D.R. Congo are currently good examples.

### **Yearning for True Democracy**

In January 2011, Tunisian President Mr. Ben Ali stepped down due to public pressure after 23 years in power. Some have described him as a dictator yet he was re-elected to office in 2009 with 89.6% of the votes (www.bbc.co.uk/...). This may indicate that even in democratic elections the electorate can hardly express their genuine opinion through the polls conducted and supervised by an authoritarian regime. However, he dissolved the government and parliament and declared a state of emergency before he fled on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011 to Saudi Arabia, amidst violent demonstrations over economic problems and hardships that became intolerable to the people of Tunisia (www.bbc.co.uk/...). Interestingly, the ruling party of the ousted President Ben Ali is known as Constitutional Democratic Rally (party) while many Tunisian demonstrators alleged that the practice on the ground was not different from authoritarian rule. Perhaps, Ben Ali's Democratic Rally (party) was a fitting camouflage (The Standard, 20/1/2011:34).

Indeed the nature of democracy has been conceived differently by many African leaders. Apart from Tunisia, Libya is also considered a democracy by its leader, Colonel Muammar al Gaddafi, who has been in power since 1969. However, violent unrest which began on 15<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2011 against the 41 year regime of Gaddafi, may succeed or fail to oust him from power (Daily Nation, 22/1/2011:19). Egypt is equally a democracy with President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak in power from 1981-2011. Mubarak's political party is called National Democratic Party (NDP). As a sequel to the ouster of former Tunisian president, Ben Ali, mass demonstrations began across Egypt demanding that Mubarak resigns as president (Daily Nation, 10/2/2011:16). The mass demonstrations lasted for 18 consecutive days before Mubarak finally gave up power in February 2011. In the period when public pressure mounted on Mubarak, from 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011, he appointed the first Vice-President in 30 years. Indeed, we cannot justifiably discount the fact that Ben Ali, Gbagbo, Gaddafi and Mubarak achieved significant economic developments for their respective countries; unfortunately, when difficult times inextricably linked with waves of change suddenly erupt such developments are hardly considered by most people.

In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986, a period of 25 years. Admittedly, his regime has achieved a lot for Uganda but he is not yet ready to relinquish power. In view of the uprising in North African states, Ugandan Opposition leader and presidential candidate Kizza Besigye of Interparty Cooperation (IPC) remarked ahead of the 2011 presidential election that Uganda was due for an Egypt-style uprising if Museveni was announced as the winner of the polls. Nevertheless, Museveni was again declared the legitimate winner of the presidential polls of 18<sup>th</sup> February 2011 (The Standard, 21/2/2011:8). In central Africa, Laurent De'sire Kabila having captured power on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1997 after 30 years of fighting and finally ousting dictator president Mobutu Sese-Seku of the former Republic of Zaire. Mobutu was in power from 24<sup>th</sup> November 1965 to 16<sup>th</sup> May 1997, a total of 32 years. However, Laurent Kabila quickly declared former Republic of Zaire, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) while being the military Head of State and president of the country (news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Africa/1121068.stm). He banned all political parties except his own and promised elections that were never held before his death on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2001 (en-wikipedia.org/Laurent-De'sire...). Laurent Kabila was succeeded by his son Joseph Kabila, a military officer, as president on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2001. In November 2006 Joseph Kabila was confirmed as elected president following the general elections of July 2006. It was the first multi-party elections in DRC in 46 years.

It can be rightly argued that African presidents do not easily succumb to mass demonstrations urging them to quit office. They do not think it will be a democratically right course of action to respect the *will* of the people especially when they have been in power for too long. Rather, some of our presidents perceive it as an act of cowardice to resign, even when demonstrations evolve into bloody confrontations between the people and the leadership.

### 'Negative' Liberty and Leadership

Some concerns also observed by Mill (1806-1873) in his exposition on *liberty* describe the culture of impunity we experience in Africa's democracies. Mill aptly notes that a study of the actual development of the institutions within democracy shows the necessity for certain limitations being imposed upon the powers of the government. The people who exercise power are not the same as those over whom it is exercised. They not only develop their own interests, but they are frequently influenced by pressure groups to work against the welfare and well-being of the people (Ochieng-Odhiambo, 1994:50). The quest for selfish interests is one of the problems African and non-African scholars often underscore about political leadership in Africa. In spite of Mill's concerns to ensure that those at the helm of authority do not oppress individual citizens and minority groups, he seemingly laid too much emphasis on individual liberty which has been exploited by some individual leaders in modern African states. There are different conceptions of liberty and this has impacted negatively on Africa's democracies. That is why some African philosophers like Henry Odera Oruka (1996:19) criticize the concepts of liberty by Mill and John Locke – terming such concepts as *negative liberty*, according to which an individual needs to have an absolute and uncensored freedom of action. They defined liberty in terms of absence of opposition or

restraint (Odera Oruka, 1996:19). Odera Oruka's criticism portrays some of the African experience with political leadership. He states that: Mill advocates that every man must be free to act on his opinion as long as this does not affect others even if the man's action is detrimental to himself (Oruka, 1996:19). Thus he contends that Mill's concepts of liberty may lead us either to a society in which a handful of individuals indirectly control and exploit the rest or it may lead us into anarchy (Oruka, 1996:22). This is true of many African nations where a small group of individuals continue to defy the *will* of the people to step down from power. The current regimes of Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, illustrate the situation where a small group of individuals continue to control political power. Sudan was a typical example until the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in Nairobi between Bashir's regime and Sudan's People Liberation Movement (SPLM), which resulted in January 2011 Referendum in South Sudan that could see South Sudan emerge as a young independent African state (David Ochami, 2011:18). President Bashir ascended to power through an Islamist-backed coup in 1989. Thus he has been in power for 22 years (David Ochami, 2011:18). The struggle to capture the presidency has been a major source of political conflicts and anarchy in post-colonial Africa.

### Ethnicity and Democracy

Many African countries are still deeply divided along ethnic lines and this has rendered circumstances that could lead to change in the leadership of a state potential conflict occasions. Kwasi Wiredu sums up the social situation in which we are when he states: In the post-colonial period our experiments in democracy have been imitations of Western, multiparty majoritarianism. But this has politicized and exacerbated pre-existing dissensions and created new ones with deadly consequences. It should have been clear, on only a little reflection that, in view of the ethnic configurations and other divisions in many African countries, such a system bore nothing but danger for us (Kwasi Wiredu, 1999:42).

As a result of the enormous powers and influence that African presidents exercise, even in a democratic set-up, no ethnic group wants to easily give up the contest for the presidency. The problem of inter-ethnic antagonism is deeply rooted in most of Africa's multi-ethnic nations practicing democracy: Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, Burundi, D. R. Congo, Cote d' Ivoire, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Guinea among others. It is difficult to realize the extent to which *negative* ethnicity undermines the democratic aspirations of African people. Perhaps the political crisis that prevailed in Burundi in the 1990s best illustrates this point. The late President Melchior Ndadaye of Burundi, after winning the June 1993 elections proceeded to form a coalition government headed by a Tutsi Prime Minister (Fredrick O.Wanyama, 2000:35). The coalition government ensured that proportional representation of the two ethnic groups, Tutsi and Hutu, were in the cabinet. Presumably, the Tutsi could not accept nor imagine being ruled by a Hutu president. This led to the October 1993 Tutsi *Coup d' etat*, in which president Ndadaye (a Hutu) was assassinated (Wanyama, 2000:35). This did not control ethnic resentment and so it engendered another coup that was executed in July 1996 which saw Major Pierre Buyoya, a

Tutsi, ascend to power as tension prevailed (Wanyama, 2000:35). It seems obvious that there are conditionalities for liberty to thrive positively in our democracy. The problems emanating from liberty in Africa is not confined to our experience with political leaders. The problem is two-fold in the political arena: first and foremost, there are the problems of dishonesty, inefficiency, in-transparency and mutual distrust within leadership as already highlighted and secondly, the problems of Africa's electorates in connection with their negative roles in general elections of our young democracies. These latter problems are manifestations of the fact that most people or citizens may not be wise or sufficiently educated to be able to perceive for themselves what is right and consequently have to be directed by others. Here, the "others" will include politicians who, indeed, could be of dubious characters concerned with the lust and greed associated with power. Some of them misguide the unenlightened electorate through propaganda and false promises in order to ascend to the position of power and authority.

### Challenges in Africa's Democracies

Ignorance and myopic views toward both viable and unviable political manifestos by the majority of electorates during campaign periods contribute to the election of politicians who lack the genuine mind-set and character for leadership either for the presidency or ministerial positions in a democratic government. The freedom to vote, which is a component of political liberty, has been massively abused by electorates in Africa's democracies as a consequence of ignorance. Universal suffrage in many democracies is undermined by illiteracy and *negative* ethnicity which contribute to entrenchment of corruption in most African governments and societies. This is not a social problem that prevails in African states alone. However, corruption and nepotism are forms of expression of liberty which contribute in crippling many of Africa's feeble economies. E. Nwabuzor and M. Mueller (1993:135) duly assert that: The corruption of many bureaucracies in Africa is infamous. Politicians are also widely suspected of, and implicated in corruption; the police are regularly amenable to bribery and in many states the judiciary is also not above suspicion. Corruption also spreads into public or semi-public corporations and even into private business enterprises. The promise of almost every new ruler whether military or civilian is to stamp out corruption.

The prevalence of corruption in every fabric of society definitely entails acting blatantly as one wishes and this is unquestionably inseparable from liberty in the ordinary sense of the term. Although corruption involves both the rich and poor classes of society it may be argued that it is the grand corruption involving political leaders that often constitute a debilitating blow to our feeble economies in the long run. The culture of impunity among political leaders is a problem that has plagued both democratic and non-democratic countries of Africa. We need to transcend certain aspects of human frailties to be able to reap the benefits of a viable political framework such as in authentic democratic government which can propel the development of a state to immense heights in the standards of culture. Plato asserted that "until wisdom coincides with leadership, nations will never be freed from corruption and injustice" (Cletus N. Chukwu, 2002:252-3). His assertion, indeed, is both philosophical and prophetic. It points to the

very problem that haunts us in our general struggle for national development in modern Africa. By extension, one would add that until wisdom permeates not only the actions of our political leadership, but also all our democratic practices, rituals and values such as liberty, equality and variety, our anticipation of general benefits of democratic government will continue to elude the general public of African States.

Plato also criticized democracy because of its unlimited emphasis on equality. It is relevant to examine his contention to see if it contains grains of truth to show that humans possess or acquire unequal capacities for handling various facets of national affairs ( Stumpf, 1982:72-73). As a result, he deemed it out of order to allow, for example, men and women deficient in moral integrity, wisdom and leadership skills to be sworn into positions that authorize them to control an economy and life aspirations of millions of citizens. Undoubtedly, democratization entails equal opportunities for individuals as well as collective development. However, wisdom must be employed in the practice of this democratic principle that is considered as a universally valid moral value. Equality or equal opportunity as a democratic right does not mean that a bunch of incompetent power mongers should be elected into top leadership positions to manage the affairs of a state for the simple reason that democracy grants every citizen the liberty to contest in elections. Corruption and injustices will prevail because power corrupts those who are not fit to serve the people. That is why the way we conceive and practice the principle of equality is crucial in the development of democracy in Africa. Are all humans equal? If humans are not in fact equal in their endowments, or merits, why ought they to be treated equally? There is no consensus among philosophers on such issues. As Raphael (1992:131) aptly states, "some philosophers argue that there is no right to positive equality of treatment, and no factual equality among men on which to base such a right....To give flute to those with a capacity for flute-playing is discrimination on relevant grounds." Thus, the relevant discrimination also applies in giving political leadership only to those who are capable of exercising it.

Lack of adequate civic education prevails as a major challenge and a form of limitation to achieving our democratic ideals. In different African states, ethnic factors overwhelm the electorates. The majority of them vote along ethnic and religious lines not in view of the viability of a given political party manifesto. Consequently, men and women who do not sufficiently possess the capacity to govern are elected to leadership positions. Eventually, their performances become offensive to the people they represent. This sentiment occurs for the simple fact that the people ignored the philosophical truth that humans are unequal in their capacities to perform certain functions or roles in our social and political life. This trend in Africa's democracies is a chronic disease that needs to be addressed particularly through the promotion of education at all levels by African governments. There will be better chances of progress in Africa's democracies if most people and leaders perform duties and functions they are best suited especially in light of the life-skills they possess. In every society, ancient and modern, people acquire different skills and training which enable many to become specialists in various works of life. This possibility of specialized knowledge and skills imply that our strengths are unequal in different areas of human endeavours. For example, one who

has not yet acquired any form of military training should not be sent to the war front or to lead armed troops into it. One who has military training and the other who has not remain unequal in terms of their capacity to lead troops into battle. This is my perception of the point that Plato was attempting to make with reference to the practice of democracy. Democracy allows that every citizen has the liberty and equal right to vie for even the highest office in a state. If the individual can command and obtain majority of the votes cast, then he or she becomes head of state whether the individual is literate or illiterate, competent or incompetent. This has compounded the practice of democracy in Africa.

Democracy is a complex form of political system and form of culture that cannot be presented as a balance-sheet because it continues to evolve as it seeks to cater for all and provide the democratic atmosphere in which anyone can achieve his or her highest aspirations fairly and justly. In a democratic set-up our individual capacities for political leadership are unequal. However, it is a known fact that in Africa, when someone is financially wealthy he or she is tempted to believe that aspiring for political leadership has become an open possibility. This is an unfortunate social reality that propels many persons to contest for political power in most of Africa's democracies. As a result, many individuals with little or no leadership acumen abandon their jobs and step into the political arena because they see it as a playground that can catapult them into greater personal wealth, fame and influence. Conversely, democracy requires legislators with leadership skills, intellectual capital, moral integrity and a spirit of sportsmanship. In this regard, Jaspers contends that:

Reasonable democracy is always ... inseparably connected with the existence of statesmen (and women) who recognize the ethical-will of the people itself, and give political form to this will. For the reasonable statesman 'politics itself is ethics'... The reasonable statesman is only possible on the basis of reason in the people, to which he is able to give expression through trust and consistency in the community of reasonable people (Chris Thornhill, 2002:180).

Arguably, the majority of Africa's politicians elected to different categories of our legislative assemblies are not statesmen and women and this majority does not consider politics itself as ethics. For this vast majority, politics is a contest to be fought tooth and nail. It is a matter of life and death. The ethical-will of the people is perceived by some as a secondary motive for leadership. Simultaneously, the blame is not all up to our elected leaders.

The electorates have their fair share of the problems of political leadership. Our electorates must bear the immoral responsibility of electing those who fall short of the integrity for leadership to our legislative institutions. This is a social problem we must solve. It is a challenge to Africa as a whole. If we continue to have a majority of unreasonable people in our legislative assemblies, it may imply that Africa's electorates are communities of unreasonable people; whereas it is not the case at a time when many of Africa's democracies are becoming saturated with educated people and graduate unemployment.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

It is known that the high standards of democracies in the advanced West were not achieved over night. This does not mean we should not criticize the leadership of Africa's democracies if it can help improve the way we deal with governance in the continent. The culture of impunity makes the young democracies of Africa to assume the complexion of authoritarianism. There is need for us to transcend our selfish interests and *negative* ethnicity in our social and political affairs which lead deliberately to exploitations and confrontations that undermine our democracies. It can be argued that we are still far from achieving most of the values and benefits of democracy. Thus we are directly responsible for improving the standards of democracy in Africa. We shall eventually get there if we are determined and committed to the course of viable democracy. We must build on whatever gains we have made already instead of pulling them down. If we learn to vote rightly and ensure that there are effective mechanisms instituted to make transparency and accountability to be maintained at any costs, then we can move forward and free ourselves from Leviathan-like rulers, which is in conflict with the nature of true democracy.

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