Cooperative Collegial Democracy for Africa and Multi-ethnic Societies

Democracy without Tears

Emefiena Ezeani

PETER LANG

AFRICA IN DEVELOPMENT
Vol 13

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List of Abbreviations

AG	Action Group
BBC	British Broadcasting Service
CBN	Central Bank of Nigeria
CCD	Cooperative Collegial Democracy
CDC	Constitution Drafting Committee
CPDS	Cooperative Pyramidal Democratic Structure
CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
EU	European Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRA	Irish Republican Army
KADU	Kenya African Democratic Union
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KPU	Kenya People's Union
MPA	Ministry of Public Accountability
NCNC	National Council of Nigerian Citizens
NEPU	Northern Elements Progressive Union
NFP	National Federation Party
NPC	Northern People's Congress
NPN	National Party of Nigeria
NPP	Nigerian People's Party
NRM	National Resistance Movement
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PPA	People's Progressive Alliance
PR	Proportional Representation

RMAFC	Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SDL	Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua
SF	Sinn Féin
UPN	Unity Party of Nigeria
UUP	Ulster Union Party

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For more than twenty years, my intellectual attention has been strongly drawn to the practice of democracy and political process in Africa. In tertiary institutions, I had heated discussions with a number of students on the subject; and while some disagreed with my views, others positively agreed with them. The political situation in many African societies has barely changed since that time, thus confirming my scepticism and major democratic hypothesis. The development of my political philosophy has its nascent foundation in those debates and I am, therefore, grateful to those students, such as Theophlius Odukwe, Chidi P. Nwanekezie, Uzochukwu F. Uyanne, and Obi Josephat Oguejiofor, with whom I had so many fruitful discussions.

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Emefiena Ezeani
Unubi/London, August 2012

Foreword

The author has written a most instructive and thought provoking book on alternative forms of democracy for Africa and multi-ethnic societies. His book focuses round the argument that a democratic state should not simply adopt the liberal party system form of democracy, but should and indeed must take national considerations into account, especially in plural societies. He argues that historical antecedents, cultural and religious diversity need to be accommodated.

I can only speak from personal experience of Nigeria's political system and how since independence in 1960 it has done less than justice for its people. Having had the British parliamentary system foisted on it, and finding how inadequate this was for a country as racially and religiously diverse as Nigeria, and following a tragic civil war, and a series of military dictatorships, the American presidential system was adopted as a possible way of securing democracy for the country. This however led to a weak willed democratic system where the incumbent oligarchy simply protected their own interests above those of the people. Since independence, attempts at democratic government have proved to be thoroughly inadequate, where the minority have abused their power at the expense of the majority of the population; this in spite of the country's vast and rich natural resources. If the country could find a system of government which would embrace the democratic ambitions of the majority of the population, and was seen to work for the greater good, then Nigeria would be one of the world's economic, cultural and social success stories. The same can also be said about other African countries.

The author's argument proposes a *cooperative collegial democratic system*, which I believe would merit well in a country as diverse as a number of African countries. I think his ideas are original, thought provoking and have great merit. He has written a thoroughly lucid and well argued case for democracy, and I can only admire and support this superbly written

and well researched book. I find it so refreshing that the author has argued such radical and new ideas for democracy based on solid research, and can whole heartedly recommend this to everybody who is interested in a fair world, where the aspirations of all citizens are taken into account.

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Dorset, England, March 2012

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Introduction

Why is it that a number of societies in the world, particularly pluralistic ones, are finding it difficult to practise democracy without *tears*? Not only that their political processes are marred by rancorous elections, there are also incidents of violence stemming from the attempts by some of these societies, especially those in Africa and Asia, to practise democracy, which no longer make headlines. This is because democracy-induced violence has been accepted as a democratic norm and many are tempted to conclude that democracy is not working in these societies. However, there should be a caveat: *which democracy*?

It is important to specify which type of democracy seems problematic in the political landscape of these societies. As there are other forms of democracy, and since these societies try to practise the liberal party model, the question that ought to be asked is: why is the *liberal* party model of democracy not working in these societies? This qualification is important otherwise one fails to address the relevant question and ends up with a wrong conclusion.

By way of analogy, it may be medically misleading to ask if a patient responds well to food. This is because the patient may respond differently to different types of food – *solid* food and *liquid* food, for instance. In this case, not all types of food may be equally suitable to the patient, similar to Binningsbø Malmin Helga's argument that 'not all types of democracy are equally suitable' (Helga, 2006: 2) to every country.

The above point is emphasised by other authors like Frank Cunningham, for whom democracy is also context sensitive. Here, lies the central argument in this work, which also examines a number of factors and institutions, which grossly influence the practice, and deepening of democracy in different societies, especially in Africa. These factors include *ethnicity*, *religion*, *the judiciary*, and *the party system*. All these social dynamics are relatively considered in depth in this study.

Also examined are the concept of democracy, democracy in pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa and the unanswered *national questions* in plural societies. Further emphasis is placed on the *party system* or the liberal democracy for a number of reasons. For example, for many years, democracy has revolved so much around party politics that it is now hardly conceivable to talk about democracy without political parties. Yet, in spite of the benefits of political parties in establishing democracy and fostering democratic culture in America and in some European societies, in many African as well as non-African states, the party system functions differently and subverts democracy in a number of ways.

Some scholars have compared the relationship between political parties with that of enemy armies, a truism with many empirical manifestations in different African states where political parties function as instruments of violence and mutually opposing forces of anarchy. Despite all its benefits, attempts to practise the party model of democracy have wrought havoc in many African and non-African societies.

All this notwithstanding, some political analysts still insist that the party system is a *conditio sine qua non* for the institution of democracy in the modern world. This means that there is an intrinsic relationship between modern democracy and the party system, a hypothesis that is vigorously challenged in this work. As some political commentators have observed, instead of attenuating, the liberal party system tends to intensify the negative roles of the other dependent socio-political variables – *ethnicity*, *religion* and *the judiciary* – in instituting and consolidating democracy in multi-ethnic societies.

In a situation where politics and conventional methods of election into political posts have been reduced to instruments of violence and warfare without any prospect or guarantee of abating, re-engineering a more functional and relatively violence-free electoral system seems a categorical imperative. While *optimists* may think otherwise, *pessimists*, like Peter Ustinov would argue that: 'The point of living, and of being an optimist, is to be foolish enough to believe that the best is yet to come' (Ustinov in BBC, 2004) even when nothing is changed by people living in the society that requires change. Some do argue, however, that the problem lies with the quality of the human persons in a given society rather than in the type

of system of governance itself, and so insinuate that Africa is not yet mature to practise democracy. Based on research findings and historical political antecedents, this work does not share the above view but instead argues that in the long run, consolidation of democracy in a post-colonial African or multi-ethnic society will entail development of a range of democratic mechanisms of participation and elections that are at variance with the Western neo-liberal model.

The long-lasting nature of the unhealthy political situation in Africa and in some other places, therefore, calls for a democratic paradigm shift. In light of this, this work recommends for African societies and any multi-ethnic society a *cooperative*, instead of a *competitive* method of government formation; a political system, which would effectively resolve national questions that continue to afflict different African states and so, make it difficult to institute a healthy democracy, which is imperative for economic development.

In view of the above conviction, I have propounded a *cooperative* model of democracy – *Cooperative Collegial Democracy* – for African and other multi-ethnic societies. Like some other political analysts of democracy in Africa, I am convinced that the failure to adopt a context-relevant political system, with stringent anti-corruption laws and measures, will continue to impact negatively on the consolidation of democracy in these societies and on the economic and social life of their people, thus rendering their states dysfunctional in perpetuity. Whether it is impossible to form a government without the instrumentality of political parties, and whether a polity that operates a *party-less* model cannot be described as democratic, safe and productive, as Giovanni Sartori would like his readers to agree to, are also some of the issues explored in this work. We begin by examining the meaning of the concept *democracy*.

CHAPTER ONE

What is Democracy?

Discrepancies in the understanding and explanation of the concept of democracy, even by democratic theorists, makes one wonder how many people in society understand what it actually means. Frank Cunningham's discussion with a Chinese student who, with thousands of other students, risked his life in 1989 in the struggle for democracy in China is a revelation. The Chinese student told Cunningham, '... that although he had risked his life in Beijing and some of his friends had lost theirs in the democratic cause, neither he nor they could claim to know just what democracy is' (Cunningham, 2002: 2). Why are people prepared to die for what they do not know much or anything about? One may ask. It is, however, not within the scope of this work to offer or attempt an answer to this question. Suffice it to say, however, that discourse, both local and international around the concept democracy, has helped to package it as a sociological *summum bonum*, highest good, and worthy to die for.

Cunningham indicts contemporary democratic theorists for being 'in a similar situation to that of the Chinese student' and yet 'advance definitions of "democracy" with confidence or write of the preconditions, values, or problems of democracy in a way that assumes their readers understand the meaning of the term' (Cunningham, 2002: 2).

The history of democracy has been that of struggles for freedom and equality. In the global arena, the term *democracy* remains one of the most popular and cherished concepts. The significance and splendour of democracy have not only been acclaimed in many parts of the world, it has also been recognised as a necessary condition for peace and development. With the seeming inability of the *free-market* (the neo-liberal prescription) to set in motion the process of development in economically developing countries, the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) and *World Bank* and

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