



Features: THE PARADOX OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

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Liberal democracy is the rule by the people where a freely elected government respects individuals, minority rights, the law and independent institutions. Democracy does not reflect this reality if it shapes and changes this rule. Paradoxes arise because human beings are contextual creatures and make voting decisions based on the circumstances and the thinking of the people around them rather than reason. The paradox is whether those who get the mandate to form the government truly represent the will of the people. Some people vote into power candidates who make promises which all know will not be kept. The belief that every voter should be free and independent to vote without being affected by ideology can in times of political uncertainty lead to system-freezing. As political polarization increases, it leads to antagonistic exchanges not only between politicians and political parties but even among the electorates. People may be interested in providing arguments for buttressing their views, but neither side is genuinely interested in the arguments of the other. The real aim is to 'score points' with the objective of defeating the other side in a competitive activity. Political debate is not about 'arguing to learn' but 'arguing to win.'

African politicians find it difficult to win elections based on delivering universal benefits. Africa therefore needs a

political leadership that has a vision of strengthening democracy and shaping a new reality, which is able to confront problems that the average African faces each day. Out of emotional, partisan, economic, ethnic and religious sentiments, people who lack the art of political leadership are often given the opportunity to rule countries in Africa that had protected the Infant Jesus. "Out of Egypt have I called my son and my chosen ones" (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:13-23). Given that Africa was the most secure continent in the world, the Holy family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph went to Egypt (Africa) to escape the terrorism of Herod against Jesus and the holy innocent children. Africa does not lack good leaders even in the present dispensation. The problem is that people of integrity are not allowed to come up in an expensive democratic system. It is as if bandits have conquered the political space with heavily armed security agents to defend them and crush their genuine opposition as perceived enemies.

To elucidate this point, we need to know that Africa has historical records of men and women who have made sacrifice for their various empires, kingdoms and nations. Shaka the Zulu of kwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, Wangari Maathai of Kenya, Chinua Achebe of Nigeria, Kofi Annan of Ghana, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Desmond Tutu of South Africa, John Garang De Mabior of South Sudan, Kingsley Holgate of South Africa, Julius Kambarage Nyerere of Tanzania and Josina Muthemba Machel, a Mozambican woman who joined the struggle for independence. At the age of twenty-four, she married Samora Michel who became the first president of Mozambique. Testimonies of African heroes are endless. This shows that what we lack is not people who could provide good leadership. Could it be an accident that Africa now produce political leaders who lack the skills of governance but could have done better in the areas of their actual discipline? That politics is lucrative has made some people taken their real vocation and profession has unfulfilling mission that should be left in the trash. This is indeed a paradox and irony that contradict existential contentment. Governance is a divine vocation to service just like every other profession that aims to add value to human dignity. Even in the African traditional context, the heir apparent to the throne is trained in the art of leadership just as Prophet Elisha was trained by Prophet Elijah.

African leaders were not known for selling African people and storing the traditional treasury in foreign nations except for art exhibition to promote the wealth of the land. Ahmed Sekou Touré (1922-1984), the first president of Guinea refused to sell the wealth of Guinea to France. In 1958, Guinea rejected the constitution of the French President Charles de Gaulle and called for independence. Touré insisted that "it is better to be poor and free, than to live in opulence and be a slave." Yaa Asantewaa (1840-1921) was compared to Saint Joan of Arc because of her patriotism. She was a great woman, a politician, war strategist, and political activist. In 1900, she led a rebellion against the British to defend the Golden Stool, the symbol of the Ashanti nation. The rebellion was eventually quelled by British forces who forced her into exile in the Seychelles, but she remained a symbol of courage and strength in the face of oppression. Sedick Isaacs was one of the heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle until his arrest in 1964 and sentenced to twelve years in prison on Robbin Island (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moremi_Ajasoro).

The Olori Mọremí Àjàsorò, Princess of the Yoruba lived in the 12th century. She hailed from Offa and was married to Oranmiyan, the heir to the King of Ife and Founding Father of the Yoruba tribe, Oduduwa. She was a very brave and beautiful woman who, in order to deal with the problem facing her people, offered her only son in sacrifice to the Spirit of the river Esimirin so that she could discover the strength of her nation's enemies. She was taken as a slave by the Ugbo and, due to her beauty, married their ruler as his anointed queen. After familiarizing herself with the secrets of her new husband's army, she escaped to Ile-Ife and revealed this to the Yorubas who were able to subsequently defeat them in battle (Oyeronke Olajubu (2003). *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere* (McGill Studies in the History of Religions); (SUNY Press. p. 29). For a woman to sacrifice her only son to save her people calls for deep reflection on the failure of the African nations. Nigeria must never forget great women like Amina of Zaria. Even now, there are honest and credible Africans who can selflessly transform the different countries in Africa if they resolve that what concerns all takes priority over any selfish ego.

Africa can set the pace and standard for the world if Africans are aware of their individual potentials to survive the

international politics that has kept the nations aground. Europe and America are fully aware that civilization started from Africa. The potentials of Africans are not hidden anywhere in the world. The time has come for us to put our house in order. Nigeria for instance can remain the giant of Africa, if Nigerians can remember her history and her role in the Pan African struggle. Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki once visited Nigeria before becoming President of South Africa. In the face of the coup in São Tomé and Príncipe in 2003, Nigeria restored the elected President back to power. The ancient Benin kingdom had street lights fueled by palm oil before Europe. Benin art works started over five hundred years ago and this abounds in European Museums. The first television station in Africa was NTA Ibadan (1960) long before Ireland had their RTE station.

Africa need to stand and gird her loins with the truth that this world is not our eternal home. Let us wake up and put on the breastplate of righteousness and shod our feet with the equipment of the message of peace. It is time to take the shield of faith, with which we can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. Let us take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Let us begin to pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Ephesians 6:14-18). I believe that when merit and efficiency are allowed to reign in justice, the light of progress would beam on the dark politics that have clouded the nations. Let us source for the true light in order not to walk in darkness. May God give us the light of life (John 8:12). Africa, arise and unite! Begin to shine and proclaim that nothing is difficult for a willing heart!

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