DEMOCRACY, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY IN AFRICA

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AGGREGATIVE AND DELIBERATIVE MODELS OF DEMOCRACY

The world, indeed, Africa is bedeviled by a number of concerns that has questioned the realities of our social existence, as it relates to how we perceive ourselves, others and human social experiences in our contemporary lives. As a result of this, there seems to be a collapse of our sense of values, hope and confidence necessary for the activation and sustenance of the matrix of social solidarity and human development in Africa. Evidence abound of the different challenges facing Nigeria and in fact Africa's social and political landscape at the moment, namely; the problem of social order: armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry, Boko haram, poverty, hunger, unemployment, disease, injustice, corruption, uneven allocation of human and material resources among others. It is not that these concerns are intractable since similar matters have been clinically addressed in other climes. The question is, why have these challenges, despite the attempts to address them, remain resilient and a daunting task in many African states?

The demand therefore for an adequate political order to address the above challenges in Africa has not only been imperative and compelling because of the complexity of our heterogeneous social existence, arising partly from our ever increasing complex economic and political experiences, confusion seems to have arisen as to the liberal theory to adopt for the organization of these social realities. Employing Dewey's theory of rational inquiry, we argue aggregative model did not only constraint itself to voting and election procedures, legitimizing the disempowerment of her people and making the right of the people to prevent oppression and injustice outweigh their duty of obedience, rather, the emphasis on the epistemic features of democratic

1

communication reveal the frailty of the content of aggregative spirit in democratic discourse and consequently makes social solidarity a daunting task in Africa.

The attempt in this paper is to flatten the above confusion. What many scholars and/or opinion leaders have seen as the adequate response to this concern is what many scholars have called "aggregative democratic model". In this model, "decision- making processes ought simply to aggregate the preferences of citizens in choosing public officials and parties. An outcome is thus just, following this account of democracy, if it mirrors the preferences of the majority of people" (Farrelly, 2004: 224-225). This is how Iris Marion Young (2000:19) describes this aggregative model:

> Individuals in the polity have varying preferences about
> what they want government institutions to do. They know
> other individuals also have preferences, which may or may
> not match their own. Democracy is a competitive process
> in which political parties and candidates offer their platforms
> and attempts to satisfy the largest number of people's preferences.
> Citizens with similar preferences often organize interest in order to
> try to influence the actions of parties and policy- makers once they
> are elected. Individuals, interest groups, and public officials each
> may behave strategically, adjusting the orientation of their pressure
> tactics or coalition-building according to their perceptions of the
> activities of competing preferences.

From the foregoing, the aggregative model of democracy demands that citizens participate in the political process by making their choice known through elections by voting for their candidates and thereby increasing their chances of influencing public policy. This is the popular conception of democracy that has misguided our political direction in many African states and hence can be considered too narrow or largely defective to manage our complex social and political circumstances. This is because they base their emphasis on election and democratic processes rather than the outcome of deliberative discourse, which ought to address the diverse nature of our challenges. What aggregative democracy throws up sometimes are docile and incompetent political office-

holders that can hardly understand the epistemic content of the political discourse and policy direction. In other words, we should not see democracy as solely "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making people decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will" (Schumpeter, 1967:353) nor should we see it as "that which provides institutions for the expression and finally, the supremacy of the popular will on basic questions of social direction and policy" (Appadorai, 1975:139). Democracy is more than merely a means to check on political leaders and administrators or call them to account, … "this misses out the importance of democracy for a wider range of social institutions than this narrow view captures, including the workplace" (Dewey, LW11:221). For Dewey, it is superficial to think that the government is in Washington and Albany. There is government in the family, in business, in the church, in every social group which regulates the behavior of its members.

From the above conception of democracy, at least in the sense of the range of institutions to which it applies, should not be construed narrowly. The legitimacy of democracy, "must be thought to result from the free and unconstrained public deliberation of all matters of common concern" (Benhabib, 1994:20). Since democracy is about public deliberation and not necessarily a flight of imagination, it is as recognized by Sunstein, not a mere procedure, but requires a certain sort of citizens, more specifically, it requires that citizens cultivate proper epistemic habits (Sunstein, 2003). As Dewey puts it:

> Beyond governmental machinery (Universal suffrage, recurring
> elections, political parties, trial by peers etc), democracy was
> primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated-
> experience (MW9:93).
> Such experience, expressed as collaborative
> inquiry, required the intellectual and emotional competences
> necessary to tackle shared problems and negotiate value differences
> (1991: 226-228).

The kind of collaborative inquiry been urged here is not the type that question the procedures and processes of political institutions. Of course, this is important for democracy but too narrow in relation to the epistemic content of the concept. What is being advocated here is to come up with inevitable provisional solutions to the practical and intellectual problems that sparked it- to resolve problematic circumstances. In other words, democracy is about reason and not merely about elections and voting. The democratic process offers proposals for how best to engage problems/challenges or meet legitimate needs and present arguments to convince others to accept their proposals. This is to say that the democratic process is primarily about argumentation; the discussion of problems, conflicts, and claims of needs or interest. Put differently, positions reached are tested through dialogic engagements and those not accepted are either rejected or refined by the deliberating public as the case may be. Under this arrangement, participants arrive at their decisions not by determining the preferences with the highest numerical support as the aggregative model of democracy are wont to argue, but by determining which proposals the collectives agree are supported by the best reasons.

The above model of democratic procedure has no place for party leaning, ethnic background, religious coloration or any form of primordial sentiments as we are experiencing in many parts of Africa. The goal is the wellbeing of the people and the state. This is to say then that inquiry should be understood as part of the struggle with an objectively precarious but improvable environment. It is demanded by a difficult concern that our inherited habits and standard ways of doing things run into trouble, perhaps through our actions having unexpected circumstances, through new needs and desires. These challenges prompt us to step back, look at the problems we are confronted with, and reflect on what to do next in a collaborative way. The practice of deliberation, therefore, as Gutmann and Thompson avers is an "ongoing activity or reciprocal reason-giving, punctuated by collectively binding decisions. It is a process of reaching mutually binding decisions based on mutually justifiable reasons" (2004: 234). Here, decisions are not colored by sentiments, neither are they products of any form of primordial calculations.

From the foregoing, anything that tries to frustrate or undermine this collaborative free flow of inquiry engenders antagonism and destroys democracy. The case of the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Academic Staff Union of Universities on the ongoing industrial action is a good example. Decisions are not achieved by a show of strength, neither are they products of oppression. A well-functioning democracy, therefore, as Sunstein avers, has a culture of free speech, not simply legal protection of free speech (2003:110). This culture of free speech or unfettered communication requires that citizens embrace a certain set of attitudes such as 'independence of mind', a 'willingness to challenge prevailing opinion' and a 'readiness to give a respecting hearing to those who do not embrace the conventional wisdom' (ibid). Those who fall into this category of persons are those that are ready to submit themselves to the epistemic habit of change needed to command the commitment of people to a 'life of on-going inquiry'.

The above is recognition of the allowance of diversity and difference in a discursive space. A recognition of the institutional guarantees of rights, an undistorted communication in a democratic arena where cooperative undertaking is key, instead of the suppression of another person or group through either subtle or overt violence or intimidation (Dewey, 1991: 226-228). Put differently, the expression of difference is not only the recognition of the rights of others in a dialogic space, but it also confers on others the inestimable virtue of rational inquiry in decision process and thus enriches other's life-experiences. It is this dialogical process that is the source of authority and the means of choosing among competing alternatives.

THE CHALLENGE OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

One major attack that has been given to this mode of thought is that of Richard Posner on John Dewey's deliberative democracy. In "Dewey and Democracy: A Critique" (2002: 2) Posner argues that:

> Deliberative democracy, at least as conceived by Dewey, is a purely
> aspirational and unrealistic as rule by platonic guardians. With half of the

5

population having IQ below 100 (not a point that Dewey, himself …would have been comfortable making, however), with issues confronting modern government highly complex, with ordinary people having as little interest in complex policy issues as they have aptitude for them, and with the officials whom the people elect buffeted by interest groups and the pressures of competitive elections, it would be unrealistic to expect good ideas and sensible policies be a process aptly turned deliberative.

What we can deduce from the above extract, like many of us won't argue in line with Richard Posner's thought, is that deliberative democracy is misguided and so not useful because many citizens do not always show interest in politics to warrant the conclusion that they can be politically engaged in a rationally organised discursive manner. And secondly, that even if we grant that they are disposed towards deliberative democracy, they lack the sophistication that is associated with the complexity of modern day governance. There seems to me a mistake in Posner's attack on Dewey's thought here. I doubt if Dewey is denying the fact that there are some people that are unable to deliberate on complex issues confronting the state since we are not all wired in the same manner. Rather, conceived as a way of life, Dewey argues that deliberative processes were fit to govern not simply the basic structure of government alone, but the whole of social association (LW2: 325). In other words, our take on this is that Deweyan democrats recognize different spheres of democratic politics, starting from all forms of human organizations in the family, school, local, state, and national levels of governance. The idea here is that the activities at the local level of human association will enhance democratic participation. But it should also be noted that it is not the case that all citizens are expected to be on the same page on issues of national policy concerns. Dewey did not see representation as the best solution to the challenge of governance. What is involved, he says, in all these levels of decision making is the idea of rational inquiry, which is the same at all levels of deliberation irrespective of its sophistication.

It is possible for Posner to argue that it is not only that complex issues of national policy may elicit a high level of intellectual engagement, but that the people lack the right intellectual resources to challenge even less complex concerns of the state to make proper human dialogue worthwhile and fulfilling. This seems to me like a strawman argument because Posner is ignoring the heart of Dewey`s position. As a reaction to Posner`s view here, it is imperative to note that central to the political decisions at the different levels of governance is the idea of inquiry; that is, discussants at the different levels of representation, be it national, family or local are expected to deliberate roughly the same manner, irrespective of the degree of the deliberation. And so for Posner to give a blanket approval that they lack the right intellectual resources to handle complex concerns of government is to assume that all issues of governance are complex reminiscence to rocket science.

Now, when Dewey says that the deliberative environment is that which is characterized by a certain kind of an epistemic habit of change, he is referring to a life of ongoing inquiry that requires that citizens irrespective of their intellectual sophistication embrace, as Cass Sustein says, "a certain set of attitudes such as independence of mind; a willingness to challenge prevailing opinion; and a readiness to give a respecting hearing to those who do not embrace the conventional wisdom" (Sustein: 110). This certainly does not require serious academic advancement to develop this kind of rational mind to engage people in a debate that concern issues of everyday experience. There are examples of age grades meetings of pre-colonial era in many communities in Africa where elders without formal education sit together to reason out concerns of their communities until decisions are taken on important matters that concern their socio-political realities (Ejiofor: 1981).

Yes, intellectual sophistication is needed to resolve complex matters of governance in any society, it is necessary but it is not sufficient because as Dewey says, "deliberative communicative process is fit to govern not only the basic structure of governance but the whole of human association" (LW2:325) starting from the family, school, local, state and national level. Since this mode of reasoning affects all shades of

human associations, it reaches into the whole of our lives, both individual and collective, and provides a social ideal of human flourishing (LW2: 325). Therefore, Dewey sees democracy as a way of life and consequently the reason for the wrong headedness of Posner's attack of Dewey's deliberative philosophy.

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Before we begin to discuss the issues of good governance, let us briefly talk about the conditions or the mode of dialogue that will ensure the emergence of acceptable decision by all stakeholders. This is with a view to providing a theoretical background for the analysis of the relationship between deliberative democracy and good governance. Since democracy allows for a diversity and difference of opinions, any manipulation of decisions at this point will make cooperation in a democratic system impossible. As Joshua Cohen avers, outcomes of any discourse are legitimate to the extent that they receive reflective assent through participation in authentic deliberation by all those subject to the decision in question (1989: 17-34). Put differently, the essence of deliberation is generally taken to mean that claims for or against collective decisions need to be justified to one another in terms that, given the time to reflect, these individuals can accept the decision agreed upon. The point is that in concrete terms not everybody or those affected by a given concern, for example, women and those considered to be weak in thought do appear to participate. Even when they participate, their presence is not reflective of even representation. What then are the conditions of dialogue that will ensure that participants arrive at decision not by determining what preferences have numerical strength, but by determining which proposals the collective agreed are supported by the best of reasons.

One major condition needed to enable participants arrive at decisions that are supported by reasons can be referred to as *political inclusion*. On this note, a democratic decision is acceptable only on the account that those affected by it are included in the process of decision- making. It should be noted that it is not practically possible for all the people the decision will affect to be, in real terms,

involved in the process of decision–making. This is why the involvement of even representation is imperative. This is because if they are not included in matters that concerns their existential realities, they are consequently going to be treated as means if they are to obey the rules and policy outcomes or adjust their actions according to the decisions they are not part of. By inclusion here we are saying, in line with Kwasi Wiredu (1995), the smoothing of edges or the sorting out of differences to arrive at what Ali Mazrui (1990) has called shared images. When inclusion as a political ideal is obtained, it allows for a clear expression of perspectives relevant to the concerns to which they seek solutions.

In addition to the above, as a normative ideal, democracy allows for the expression of political equality. When decision-makers are deliberating on any concern that affects their lives, those that are affected are not only included in the process of decision-making, they are to be included on equal terms. All are given equal opportunity to talk, make their voices heard and be able to criticize prevailing opinions and be ready to be criticized until decisions are reached. Such opportunity cannot exist in an atmosphere of one-party depositing idea on others. That deliberative democracy outlaws the elevation of privilege opinion in any dialogic sphere. As an act which denounces the relation of domination, dialogue is a state of responsible people operating in an arena of freedom. In Ejiofor`s (1981:140) words:

> When a motion is tabled there is exhaustive debate
> Everyone in the assembly is free to speak on it.
> Questions are asked and answered. Should who
> want to speak not have the opportunity the same
> day, debate is adjourned for as often as it is necessary
> to hear all speakers. The aim is general consensus. There
> is no formal voting (…). In the end one person advises that
> `we have seen the point clearly and cannot delay any longer:
> All approve and the presiding officer summarizes the point
> of consensus. All answer, that`s it. The decision is taken.

When people operate in an atmosphere of freedom and are tolerant of each other's view-points, they are most likely operating with some high sense of humility. In other words, dialogue as the common task of transcending differences cannot exist without humility. Put differently, if a party considers itself as superior to others or that she has a monopoly of wisdom, what we will have will be a case of suppression. Hence, in a dialogic sphere, there are "neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only men who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know" (Freire, 1970:13). What is necessary for dialogue therefore is …openness to various viewpoints, a willingness to explore and empathy, for the relative truth of each position.

Taken together all these conditions for the evolution of meaningful dialogue, what are the implications for good governance and social solidarity? Note that for there to be any meaningful and sustainable democratic arrangement, there must be an intense faith in one another and a demonstrable disposition in the possibility of transcending differences. When this is in place, no one will doubt the processes of political decision and policy outcomes of any regime because they are considered being bye-products of good reasons that emanated from the *tribunal of argumentations*.

Understood in this way, good governance means not only that the process of decision making must be in order, it is also to be noted that the process of the implementation of the decision must equally be transparent. Any government that undermines these two components of governance is running in the corridor of dictatorship and creating room for doubts and hatred of the regime. When a government is seen not to be transparent and is not accountable to her citizens, there is the tendency for the people to distance themselves from the regime, thereby questioning the legitimacy of the government. When this happens, it will be difficult to command the commitment of the people into a feeling of loyalty and support for the larger unit (Oladipo, 1998:112), just like we have it in present day Nigeria with all sorts of reaction from the different regions in the country. Hence the state lacking

the authority to command the commitment of the people, becomes an arena of conflict and social disorder, rather than integration and therefore unable to discharge its developmental duties. In a situation of this nature, it is difficult to build institutions that will guarantee peace, good neighborliness and help society foster common purposes and projects that will command the commitment of all to the common good. This is because those institutions will not be trusted and whatever comes out of it will be seen as a product of oppression and so must be avoided. This then becomes a recipe for disaster and a ready platform for antagonizing the state, as we find in various parts of Africa. It is therefore, imperative to note at this point that the purpose of the construction of an appropriate social order, or more appropriately their unsuccessful realization has unleashed certain challenges which have made the quest for social solidarity in Africa a problematic task. But how can social solidarity be achieved and enhanced in the evolution of good governance in a deliberative democracy?

The above question is important and germane to our discussion. Recall that we have said that good governance means accountability in all its ramifications. It also means unfettered access in the process of decision-making and policy, which gives room for transparency. Now, when people are included on the bases of equity and their voices are not excluded from the scheme of things, it will not only make people committed to the outcomes of the results of the decision, and consequently bring people of disparate views and ideas into a coherent whole, it makes social solidarity inevitable and achievable. Thereby, assuming the cementing force that binds individuals based on normative obligations that facilitate collective action and social order. In other words, social solidarity emphases interdependence between individuals on the bases of shared values, beliefs and goals among different groups in a society. This is what Emile Durkheim calls organic solidarity as against mechanical solidarity that is usually based on kinship ties of familial networks. When people are connected by their interdependence on one another by shared values in this way, it expresses the basis of many other human values, such as

friendship, companionship, and loyalty. It equally allows us to be sentimentally united to those people who are supported.

It is important to note that not everybody in a social group of this nature is there for the good of others, there are those usually referred to as *free riders*, that is, those that seek to reap, as Graham Crow says, "the benefits of the groups action without incurring any costs themselves" (Crow,2002: 118). But as social beings, especially when we realize the way our present sordid circumstances has adversely affected our socio-economic and political lives, the need to recognize that we must push to work together to create a better society has become inevitable and urgent. We are all members of the same family and are connected in one way or the other, our coming together inspires action for the promotion of the common good of others. In other words, social solidarity is a value that makes our lives fruitful, more meaningful, and it is also a practice that strengthens societies in a meaningful manner.

From the outset, we have not said that democracy is wrongheaded, neither have we said it is a perfect form of human organization. What we have queried is the aggregative mode of democracy that emphasizes procedures and institutions, which demands that citizens participate in the political process by making their decisions through voting. Democracy is a fuller and wider idea than can be exemplified in this narrow manner. For its true meaning to be realized, it must affect all modes of human association. In fact, as Dewey avers, democracy is a way of life. It is not simply connected to a group of persons "living in a physical proximity", rather, in a community where people share "aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge", they cooperatively participate in the common life of the group, and consciously share experience" (DE, MW9:7). In this sense, as he further argues, democracy is "the idea of community life itself", the clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy (PP, LW2:328). Hence, from a more generic sense, the idea of democracy from the perspective of the individual

> …consists in having a responsible share according to capacity
> in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which
> one belongs and in participating according to need in the values
> which the groups sustain. From the stand point of the groups, it
> demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in
> harmony with the interests and goods which are common.
> (PP.LW2:327-328)

From the foregoing, the essence of a democratic society consists in creating the atmosphere for individuals to exercise their right to participate in activities that promote the values and interest supported by their groups. In such a society, nobody's word is the final authority on any concern, a democratic arena is a community which is "continually and cooperatively refining its values and redirecting its custom to expand the degree of growth" (Talisse, 2000). Thus, a democratic society is necessarily a progressive and inquisitive society with a reciprocal attitude punctuated by collectively binding decisions. Through individual participation, the individual, group and/ or the society grows, consequently widening the scope of shared concerns and the liberation of personal capacities (DE, MW9:93)

It is important to note that the above cultivated attitude of cooperative inquiry is not limited to the domain of politics alone, rather, it is in the "attitudes which human beings display to one another in all the incidents and relations of daily life" LW14:226). As Dewey puts it:

> …the heart and final guarantee of democracy is in free
> gathering of neighbors on the street corner to discuss
> back and forth what is read in uncensored news of the day,
> and in gathering of friends in the living rooms of houses and
> apartments to converse freely with one another (LW14:227).

This is to say that what is at the core of democracy is the active participation of people in the collective inquiry into matters of shared interests and continually engage in cooperative discourse and reasoned debate. In other words, democracy as

a mode of human association is a way of life that recognize different spheres of democratic politics, starting from all forms of social associations in the family, school, local, state and national levels of governance. Once this spirit of inquiry urged here is cultivated, the world will be a better place to live in.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the foregoing, I have argued that the idea of democracy conceived in its aggregative mode of human social organization is too narrow and thus misguided in its quest to provide an appropriate direction to manage our socio-political and economic realities in Africa. What has made the response to our present sordid conditions compelling is not only the misguided and narrow explication and implementation of our democratic ideals and policy outcomes, rather the urgency of this quest derives from the fact that the absence of epistemic properties of deliberative discourse has made social solidarity a daunting task. What we urge in this paper, therefore, is the activation of a certain attitude in all social association characterized by the habit of change that requires the cooperative exercise of persuasion, upon an ability to convince and be convinced by reason.

As a rational procedure, we argue that this mode of reasoning will avoid the pitfalls of exclusion, dogmatism and authoritarianism associated with decision-making as we have it today. By this we mean we must reconstruct and rehabilitate existential realities. Our parliaments must cease to be centers of job creation alone; they must become centers of cooperative inquiry or curiosity in concrete terms. In addition, our families and homes must imbibe and exhibit the spirit of cooperative inquiry ingrain in democratic societies. Finally, each of us must make an effort to embrace the scientific method of inquiry in our lives, commitments, values, and received opinions. These, we have argued, will make social solidarity achievable and sustained.

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