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## Democracy and Revolution as Tools for Nation-Building in Africa

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**Abstract:** The terms 'revolution' and 'democracy' are unarguably among the most popular concepts in the lexicon of political science. These concepts have been used in different dimensions and perspectives but little has been done in unshielding the beclouded imperatives of these concepts as recycling elements of nation-building. This work focuses on democracy and revolution as veritable tools for nation-building. It argues that democracy, if not practiced in line with the established terms and conditions of the social contract that established it, may culminate in revolution; the aftermath being a better and genuine democratic culture. That is to say, revolution starts where democracy ends and the mass consciousness and ideology embedded in a particular social revolution results in a better and more unified nation-state; unity being the basic ingredient in nation-building. Both secondary and tertiary evidences have been utilized in solving the puzzles in this paper.

**Keywords:** Democracy; Revolution; Nation-building; Social contract; Colonial democracy; Problems of Nation-building.

### 1. Introduction

Nation-building as a challenge confronting states in Africa is rather, an artificial problem bred in part by European colonialists. Following centuries of trade and interaction, European trading firms and governments developed imperialism of trade and markets in certain regions of Africa. Between 1787 and the 1880s, there were some advances from trade monopoly to European political control. The energetic Frenchman Louis Faidherbe by the mid 1850s had claimed a large portion of the Senegal territory; the Portuguese had made vast claims on the Mozambique and Angola region; the British had annexed Lagos in 1861 and had declared the coastal areas of the Gold Coast a colony in 1874. By 1876, King Leopold's intensions over Congo had become glaring and Britain was also annexing and fighting for supremacy in South Africa with the Dutch (Anene and Brown, 1966). The perceived and substantial frictions between the European powers and their plight to truncate an all-out European war over African territories culminated in the Bismarck chaired Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 which gave legal backing to fortuitous divisions of African nations across ethnic and cultural boundaries thereby, creating problems of nation-building in Africa.

Hitherto, nation-building in Africa qualified Ndoli (2005) definition as "the process of politically socializing the people into becoming good citizens of the political order and making the citizen feel they have a state in the community worth fighting for". It also reflected Obasi and Erundu (2000) definition as a process of mobilizing available resources, human and materials and financial, for socio-economic and political developments of a given nation-state. However, colonialism led to the creation of artificial and arbitrary states across ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries. Thus, nation-building in the African case is seen as efforts by African states to form a formidable, stable and united state out of a conglomeration of different nations lumped together by the colonialists.

Nation-building thus, is the efforts of newly independent African states to redefine the populace of territories that have been carved out by colonial powers without regard to ethnic, religious or other boundaries (Deutsch, 2010).

Unlike what transpired in Europe among the German and the Italian city-states, in the nineteenth century, the processes that led to the establishment of contemporary nation-state in Africa were of a volatile nature; and as a time bomb, it is exploding already in different forms. The process of merging different 'nations to form a nation' has remained the greatest challenge to nation-building in Africa today. Similarly, Uya observed that:

after independence, it has become particularly clear that one of the most significant problems facing African states is how to transform largely a negative race conscious nationalism which carried them to independence to a new state conscious patriotism as a basis for sovereign identity (Uya, 2004).

Uya had also echoed Ali Mazrui's parlance when he submitted that one of the challenges facing African scholars is how to "nationalize what was sectional or ethnic" (Uya, 2004). Therefore, nation-building in the African

perspective, aside other avalanche of other challenges, is traumatized by the challenge of making a 'nation out of many nations'.

Therefore, this work seeks to show how democracy and revolution can be useful tools for nation-building in Africa. A theoretical framework is adopted to explain the cycling nature democracy and revolution. A synopsis of obstacles to nation-building is discussed and the cycling theory of democracy and revolution as well as how it enhance nation-building is also considered.

## 2. Conceptual Clarifications

This work focuses on democracy and revolution as tools for nation-building. What then is 'democracy' and 'revolution'? The word democracy originates from the Greek words 'demokratia', a term for power and 'demos' a term for 'the people'. It is a form of government first practiced in Athens in which emphasis was placed on the relevance of direct participation of ordinary people in collective self-governance (Ober, 2007).

Democracy is a form of government in which final power rests in the people; not a part of the people that makes oligarchy or a monarchy but where it rests in the whole people (Fitzgerald, 1908). Democracy connotes a popular participation in the political process and since politics is basically about the articulation and protection of group interests, for any political process to be worth the tag 'democratic' must accommodate all the diverse groups within the polity (Adewumi, 1994). To borrow from the words of Muammar Gaddafi, "there can be no democracy without popular participation". This means that for democratic process to be meaningful and achieve desirable ends, there must be conscious effort to involve a broad spectrum of the society through their organizations (Adewumi, 1994).

Democracy is also defined as a form of government in which supreme power of the state is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free election (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). President Abraham Lincoln (Lincoln, 1977) of the United States of America while trying to aver his political philosophy on the essence of Government echoed an epic definition of democracy when he submitted that "this nation (USA) under God shall have a new birth of freedom, that government of the people, by the people for the people shall not perish from the earth" (Lehman, 1977). The people here do not mean the capitalists or the superrich who live off other people's labour or those who manage workers on behalf of capitalists but the people who do the work that sustains human society (Spritzler and Stratman, 2011).

In his book *What is Real Democracy?*, K. P. Heinzen frankly averred of democracy, thus:

unless it allows itself to be downgraded by some despots to an irresponsible 'herd' of sycophant subjects, democracy abhors some select or separate part of the body politics but flourishes with the participation of the whole population dwelling upon the soil of the state. The government of the people (democracy) then means the government of the whole nation or population (Heinzen, 1871).

Heizen further gives conditions of true democracy to include; government by the people; government based on equality of rights of the whole people; common centre where the consensus will of the people may manifest itself and be put into action; vote of the majority; unlimited freedom of the press and of public discussion for all; equal right before the law and people's oriented institutions (Heinzen, 1871).

Revolution as a concept on the other hand, denotes different things to different people. It is used to describe radical changes in a number of fields and areas; for instance, technological, fashion, industrial, scientific and religious revolutions (Enor and Chime, 2015a). This perception of revolution, however, does not serve our interest in this work.

A revolution in this case in a fundamental change in political power or organizational structures that takes place in a relatively short period of time when the population rises up and revolt against the current authorities (Wikipedia Online Free Encyclopedia, 2016). It is "any and all instances in which a state or political regime is overthrown and thereby transformed by a popular government in an irregular, extra constitutional and/or violent fashion (Godwin, 2001).

Revolution is a sudden, radical or complete change in political organization; especially the overthrown or renunciation of one government or ruler by the substitution of another by the governed. It is an activity or movement designed to effect fundamental change in the socio-economic situation (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2016).

On a more holistic approach, (Weir, 1978). Raleigh (1977) sees revolution as a form of political violence that is purposive in aim, is characterized by illegality, mass participation and rapidity of change and is directed primarily at a society's established political regime while also reflecting changes in the economic, legal and social institutions of the society.

In an attempt to reconcile revolution with revolutionary situation, Todd (2003) perceives revolution to be "when people attempt to completely transform the social, economic, political and ideological features of the society...when enough people come to see the status quo as essentially rotten and unreformable, so that the only remedy is to sweep it all away and put something totally new in its place". As observed by Enor and Chime (2015b), revolution do not just reflect regime change (as demonstrated in the Arab Spring) but has to inflict some fundamental changes in the social, economic and political facets of a state immediately after the struggle for power.

Some scholars have tried a nexus between democracy and revolution. For instance, Spritzler and Stratman (2011) had defined 'democratic revolution' as the act of the great majority of people removing power from the former ruling elite, taking power into their own hands and reshaping society to provide well-being for all based on principles of mutual aid, equality and democracy.

How then is democracy and revolution a recycling process? At what level can democracy serve as a precursor to revolution? These questions are answered in the theoretical framework which serves a frame reference for this work.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

In his classical Magnus Opus *The Social Contract*, Jean Jacques Rousseau has technically answered the aforementioned questions centuries before now. According to him, the first revolution which brought about the emergence of Social Compact was borne out of the desire by men to overcome the 'obstacles to their survival in the state of nature' and harnessing available resources for self-maintenance and preservation (Rousseau, 1762). Each man possesses a force and liberty which when put together will guarantee community survival. How then can one enter into this collective effort without hurting his self's interest and care?

each man in giving himself to everyone gives himself to no-one: and the right over himself that the other get is matched by the right he gets over each of them. So he gains as much as he loses, and also gains extra force for the preservation of what he has (Rousseau, 1762).

In this social contract, according to Rousseau, everyone surrenders his or right to the Community, not the Government, for the Government is not a part of the contract. Therefore, the Community becomes sovereign and such sovereign body being formed only of the individuals who constitute it, can have no interest contrary to theirs. Whereas, the will of the individual members of the Community may conflict but the social pact or agreement includes forcing any individual who do not agree to its provisions to do so; after which he remains as free as he was before (Appadorai, 1968).

As earlier mentioned, the Government is never the same thing as the sovereign. "The act by which the Government is established is twofold, consisting first of the passing of a law by the sovereign to the effect that there shall be a Government and secondly, of an act in execution of this law by which the governors are appointed" (Appadorai, 1968).

Since the government is established by the individuals based on their social contract, it is people oriented and so much depends on the people. As a Government is not a part of the social contract, the Community or society being the sovereign, can hold the Government responsible for failure in executing the agreement of the Social Contract which it holds no membership to Shaopera (2015).

Rousseau's idea has clearly demonstrated the connection or linkage between democracy and revolution. In this case, the democracy as indicated in the freedom and liberty as associated with 'man in its state of nature' became obsolete when man could no longer assure himself of self-maintenance. Hence, the revolution of which conflicting interest of individuals in the community was forcefully incorporated for their common good. Such incorporation also signifies nation-building as the aftermath of that revolution. Moreso, the people, being the sovereign, installs a Government and governors based on 'General Will'. If the rulers fail to meet up with the expectations and terms of the contract, such democracy or contract can be terminated, hence, revolution. The aim of such revolution or termination of contract is not aimed at anarchy as suggested by some scholars, but a more responsible democracy and cohesive sovereign community, hence, nation-building. The Glorious Revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, for instance was a great leap forward for Britain. A Bill of Rights was passed by the Parliament and was accepted by the new King William and queen Marry. The Bill affirmed English civil liberties such as trial by jury and *habeas corpus* and declared the monarchy subject to the law of the land (Coffin and Stacey, 2005). This was a major achievement in the British nation-building efforts.

### 4. Problems of Nation-building in Africa: A Conspectus

Nation-building is the creation of a polity that is united and progressive. One of the greatest challenges of the state in Africa has been that of creating a unified whole or nation-state from the arbitrary demarcations and artificial boundaries created by the colonialists. Upon the arbitrary creation, the colonialists did little or nothing at institutionalizing national consciousness into its colonial peoples. The trend was that of divide and rule and emphasis was placed not on promoting national but colonial culture and language (Agi, 1999).

Moreso, nothing was done by the colonialists to directly instigate a genuine notion of 'to be nation-state', with national symbols upon which loyalties and sentiments could be focused. Coleman (1986) in narrating the Nigeria's experience averred that

There was no national symbol in form of the Head of State; the national flag was the Union Jack; the national anthem was 'God Save the Queen'; the national army was a British officered corps of Africans having the unnational title of West African Frontier Force and the national holiday was Empire day (Agi, 1999).

This was virtually the case in every other European colony in Africa. Thus, by the time of independence, various ethnic groups were loyal first to their ethnic since the idea of nationhood was still alien.

Majuk (2004) Majuk has not committed any fallacy by declaring tribalism or ethnicity to remain the foundation or the major truncating factor to nation-building. A careful analysis of trends of events in Africa will clearly vindicate this assertion for virtually all the challenges to nation-building in Africa revolve around the foundation of ethnic sentiment and cultural disparity. For instance, the disputes on boundaries may not have surfaced but it cut across different ethnic compositions. There are discords both within and outside. There are secessionist movements in Nigeria while Somalia intends reunifying it ethnic groups that cut across other states in the Horn of Africa (Barkindo *et al.*, 1994).

Ethnicity is also attached to religious sentiments. Most countries in Africa, south of the Sahara are predominantly in the formation of 'Muslim north and Christian south'. Such volatile states like Sudan could not survive to the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Others such as Nigeria are empirically on a time bomb that may explode soon if not properly managed (Anikpo, 2007).

Similarly, virtually all civil wars manifesting in different African states since independence have been precipitated by ethnic or ethnic related sentiment. The Rwandan and the Nigerian Civil Wars amongst others, were all ethnic instigated conflicts. Also, perceived marginalization by some ethnic groups and 'identity politics', has resulted in coups and counter coups which have done more harm to nation-building and utterly trample on the possibility of ethnic integration. When corrupt political office holders are confronted, they instigate flimsy ethnic appeals by unwholesomely doing everything possible to attract public sympathy along ethnic lines. African leaders even campaign for electoral positions based on ethnic and religious sentiments; thereby antagonizing one ethnic group against the other and creating discord.

There is also the challenge of religious fundamentalism which has clearly demonstrated disparity and has evidently divided the nation-states of Africa along religious lines. Amazingly, government of some nation-states in Africa (e.g Sudan during its civil war), and some prominent citizens as evidenced in the Nigerian case, covertly support terrorist groups. Such negative gestures rather than facilitate, conflicts nation-building efforts. The challenge of terrorism is also facilitated by the poverty and illiteracy rate in Africa. The poor and the intellectually bereft are easily cajoled and brainwashed into these various terrorist organizations.

Most importantly, African leaders have woefully failed the governed. They have performed far below the general expectations of the masses. African leaders have turned governance into their private business but as observed by Herbert H. Lehman, a government cannot be run solely on a business basis. A government is supposed to be humane (Lehman, 1977). Leaders in Africa have held the 'sovereign' to ransom. They have perpetuated corruption at astronomical level. For instance, Nigeria has lost 50% of its total revenue to corruption and trillions of dollars have been stolen and dumped in foreign accounts (Ekpo *et al.*, 2016). Above all, the 'sovereign' have been successfully used, dumped and antagonized on ethnic lines. Lacking the consciousness of their sovereign might, the sovereign of our times has failed to shake off the shackles off the enemy of the people.

## **5. The Recycling Nature of Democracy and Revolution as Tools for Nation-Building in Africa**

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nations have existed in Africa and possessed the attributes of a nation as described by Appadorai to include "a sentiment of unity, the resultant of forces; community of race and language, geographic unity, community of religion, common political aspirations, and, above all, historical development" (Appadorai, 1968).

However, the revolution of the middle 19<sup>th</sup> century which got to its apex at the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference ensured the partitioning of these hitherto nations and their incorporation into one single administrative entity by the European colonialists. Interestingly, the colonialist thought of African nations to be 'static barbarism' and it was their 'burden' to liberate African nations from barbarism (Uya, 2004) and create nation-states with larger territorial boundaries out of them. The logic here is that what was practiced then by African nations was 'barbarism' and therefore undemocratic. The direct implication of this was the institutionalization of 'Colonial Democracy'.

Colonial democracy was the democratic dispensation in Africa between the 1880s and the 1960s (Uwizeyimana, 2012). This democratic qualification of colonialism is borne out of the fact that some territories were indirectly governed through the people's oriented traditional institutions, some at a particular point in time could vote and be voted for and some 'were guided like babies' to attain 'civilization' and nation-building. Moreso, the home government of virtually all the colonial powers were either practicing liberal democracy or constitutional monarchy.

The question then remains, how really democratic was colonial democracy? In the Belgian colonial democratic dispensation in Congo, King Leopold II technically abolished free trade, divided Congo among concession companies and deprived the aborigines of products of the forest, thereby reducing them to the status of slaves in their country (Anene, 1966). Under this democracy, Africans were flogged, taken hostages and military expeditions were launched as compellance strategies to recruit forced labour (Harris, 1987). Leopold II himself is recorded to have hired militia to get into the countryside and forcefully recruit workers for rubber plantations. Africans who resisted forced labour were whipped and had their limbs chopped off – severed limbs were then brought to the recruit's bosses as proof of their diligence in that recruitment exercise (Hochschild, 1999). In this 'democracy', Africans were mutilated and even killed as punishment for falling short in crop production (Harris, 1987).

Similarly, the German 'democratic' order in its African colonies, especially Tanganyika was similar to that of its counterpart in Congo. The Germans were ruthless and directly supervised public works under the forced labour system. Lands were compulsorily acquired and the aborigines were settled on reserves so Europeans could acquire the best lands. In this Colonial democracy, Africans were deprived of pasture for their cattle and land for their subsistence. They were thus reduced to labourers (Barkindo *et al.*, 1994).

Also, British 'liberal democratic' dispensation in Kenya, just like its counterparts in East Africa ran a policy of segregation and about 4.5 million acres of land was confiscated from the aborigines. Rudimentary hut tax was raised not for administrative revenue, but mainly from the extraction of long-term labour (Davidson, 1978).

Another colonial democracy that is worth commenting on is that of the Portuguese under which its subject peoples had no rights. Even after abolition of slave trade, Africans were sent on contract from Portuguese colonies to

sugar plantations in Sao Tome and French Indian colonies. Africans were treated as children and were frequently disciplined with hippopotamus hide whip (Barkindo *et al.*, 1994).

Colonial democracy was therefore repugnant. It was abominable, appalling, distasteful, dreadful and disgusting. The variables which qualified it as being democratic are by far outweighed by those that deemed it imperialistic. The colonial government had successfully hijacked the sovereign power of the people thereby, perpetuating ills which were anti-people. The 'government was run solely on a business basis'. Colonial democracy had usurped the supposedly contract bestowed on it by the 'sovereign' and had failed in almost all ramifications. Colonial democracy thus, benefitted Africa in nowhere but rather complicated and made its nation-building process problematic.

The divide and rule strategy of the colonialists had sowed a seed of discord among various African groups but these groups or nations had recuperated and were unified under one cause – nationalism to terminate colonial democracy and establish a better democracy based on the consent of the 'sovereign'. While some African countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, etc, preferred the constitutional strategy of breaking the shackles of the obsolete colonial democracy, others such as Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, etc, preferred revolutionary strategy to liquidate colonialism. Since colonialism was based on violence, some believed, was the only way to liberate Africa and a genuine notion of nation-building instituted. According to Frantz Fanon,

Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders makes it possible for the masses to understand social truth and gives the key to them. Without that struggle there is nothing but a fancy-dress parade... (Fanon, 1967).

The essence of this discussion is not to determine which path to post-colonial democracy was right or wrong but to demonstrate how the revolution that uprooted colonialism could be seen as tool for nation-building. The colonialists played their role by creating artificial boundary formula. But the resolution and desire to form nation-states out of these various nations was a product of the revolutionary ideology of decolonization. Separate or distinct nations of Africa ceased seeing themselves as different people but as a one big nation united by a common cause of dismantling colonial rule in their respective countries. Also, the national consciousness garnered and utilized for political independence by various African countries was complemented with unifying elements such as the National Flag, National Anthems, Coat of Arms and promising contractual democracy.

However, the revolutionary achievements of national consciousness have been toyed with by several African leaders. By campaigning on ethnic lines, early African leaders had taken African states 100 years backwards. Their stayput tendencies, political corruption manifestations, and their inability to keep to the terms of the contract upon which they were established have altered the pace at ethnic integration and nation-building. In a paper titled *The Impact of Leadership and Governance on Nation-building*, Adebayo (2014), has painstakingly analyzed the maladies that have characterized political leadership in Africa. Corruption is now a way of life and African leaders according to Fwatshak "cart away \$20 billion yearly to foreign lands totaling about \$140 billion since independence" while the masses are suffocating in abject poverty (Fwatshak, 2013). The gap between the rich and the poor gets wider and social amenities are either not there or are not functioning. Free and fair elections are now noble dreams.

Like colonial democracy, leaders of post-colonial democracies in Africa have failed the 'sovereign'. The democracy operated in some African states can no longer accommodate the collective interest of all. The inability of the nation-state to give all its component ethnic groups a sense of belonging through the provisions of social amenities, guarantee liberty, human rights and security, equal representation in government, fair allocation of state resources amongst others, have tended to sharpen ethnic consciousness over national consciousness. The stage is thus ripe for another democratic revolution in states of Africa because a state that cannot guarantee the happiness of its citizen is not supposed to stand. As rightly observed by Fanon, "the function of a social structure is to set up institutions to serve man's need. A society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a non-viable society, a society to be replaced" (Blackey, 1974).

The revolution envisaged here is not to balance or ameliorate class contradictions as espoused by Marx and Engels (1848) but that which will replace non-performing leaders and non-viable social structures to guarantee better life for all the citizenry. This revolution will encompass a new ideology, feasible social agenda and ideals which will cement better life for the community. The aftermath of these revolutions it is hoped shall bring about a better life, better infrastructure and amenities, laws, government policies and structures that will protect the interest of the various groups including the minority and policies that will directly ameliorate religious and ethnic tensions. Through this means, not just will a better democracy be achieved but a strong and unified nation-state where its citizenry will see themselves as belonging to the nation-state first before the ethnic group.

## 6. Conclusion

If democracy is a form of government in which the political sovereignty of a nation-state is vested on the people, such government is condemned to go extra miles in ensuring that its 'sovereign' lack nothing and possess no moral or 'legal' justification "to seek after [no] other liberty, for there can be no greater liberty than a good government" (Edwards, 1977). In the case of Africa, democracy in both its philosophical and pragmatic sense will ensure a high level of responsible government where the wellbeing, security, liberty and rights of its 'sovereign' are guaranteed devoid of ethnic, cultural, religious or ideological sentiments. Such government will command respect, loyalty and a high level of patriotism for the people can rely on the government and hold it on a high esteem. The sensitive issues that sow seeds of division and decline of national consciousness will thus, be eliminated by the power of democracy.

In the absence of the above features as exemplified by colonial and post-independence democracies, a people's revolution is pertinent and imminent for it will restore the state political power on the 'sovereign' who will rightly replace the failed contract with a new vibrant one. The ideology embedded in the revolution as expressed in the pursuance of a common cause – responsible government for the 'sovereign' is also a tool of unity and oneness which are the major ingredients in nation-building. The aftermath of such revolution will also install a better government which by carrying out its contractual responsibilities garners patriotism and loyalty hence, nation-building. This process may keep recycling until the government set up by the 'sovereign' stops violating the contractual terms the 'sovereign' that established it.

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